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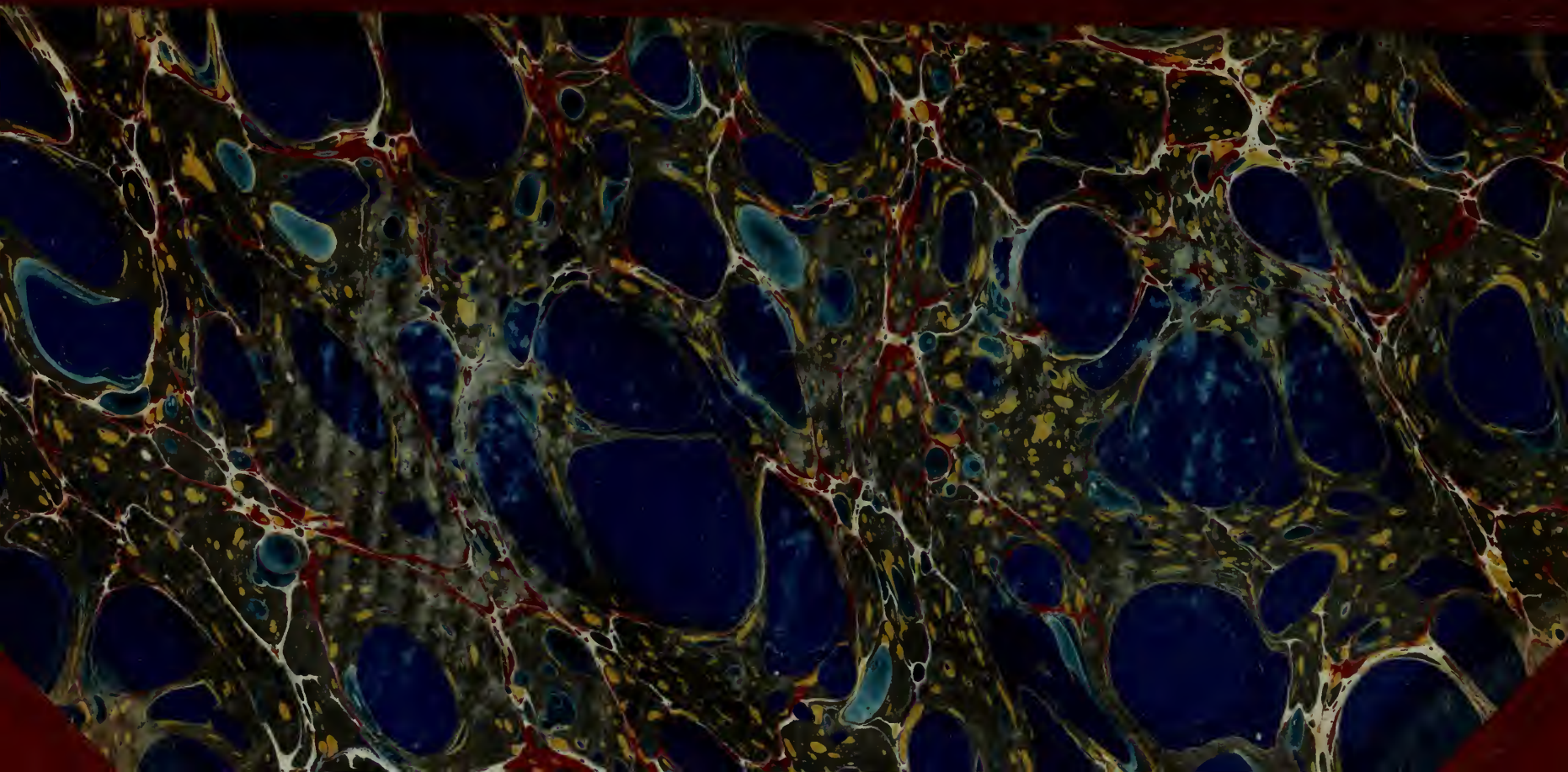

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M. ELLEN STAPLES. R. AND E. TAYLOR

WITH AN AIR OF LOVELY LANGUOR, SHE ENTERED THE LIBRARY AND RESPONDED TO WALTER'S GREETING.

"Laden with Golden Grain."

THE

ARGOSY.

EDITED BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD.

VOLUME XXXV.

January to June, 1883.

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"With an air of lovely languor, she entered the library."
"Her eyes were fixed in reverie."
"Winifred can do as she pleases."
"At the church door, the whole party met."
"Mrs. Hatherley barred the way."
"Mrs. Hatherley had the effrontery to hint that it might be Dick!"

THE ARGOSY.

JANUARY, 1883.

WINIFRED POWER.

CHAPTER I.

THE HATHERLEYS.

IN that decade which began with the bombardment of Acre, and closed four years before the Crimean War, the drawing-room of Hatherley House looked very old-fashioned indeed.

For in those days, panelled walls, tiled fireplaces, carved oak furniture, and blue china were indications of the owner's character. Instead of meaning that he swam with the tide, it meant that he fought against it. Instead of betraying him for a worshipper of fashion, it stamped him for a devotee of the past. And in Marleyford, where the Hatherleys had lived for generations, their furniture was as much identified with them as their hereditary nose (a handsome aquiline), or their grand ancestral manner.

Their neighbours, prosperous, cheery modern folk, quitting their own plate-glass and gilding, and arriving in that gloomy room, were straightway possessed with a solemn sense of the dignity of the Hatherley tradition. And Mary, the only daughter of the house, sitting in her statuesque beauty, her quaker-like dress, on a straight-backed chair to receive them, seemed hardly nearer to their desires or their habits than a graven saint in a niche, or queen upon a tomb. John, too, the eldest son and the only son at home, with *his* sober, perfect attire, his faultless, marble face, and his reputation for exotic tastes, struck one as a young man whose youth was a polite concession to the course of nature, but in no sense a period of immaturity.

While the other rich or aspirant inhabitants of the town ransacked the Herald's office for armorial bearings and blazoned its inventions on the panels of their barouches, Mary rumbled along in a roomy chariot, with nothing but an initial on its chocolate-coloured doors. And while sons of tinkers and grandsons of tailors quitted their native town to blossom into esquires elsewhere, the Hatherleys with

every successive generation struck apparently deeper roots into the soil there. They gave it to be understood that it was their pride to remain where the founder of the family had made his fortune. That which he had become, that they persisted in being; and because his ambition had been crowned the day he bought a flourishing brewery, they professed to regard a brewery as the highest earthly possession.

A very upright, but a very stern man was the present head of the house. "Old Mr. Hatherley" he had been called ever since the stroke of paralysis which had laid him low, and left the greater part of the business in the hands of his son, John. He was everything which his father and grandfather had been before him, and more. A man of puritanic simplicity of life, and of rigid uniformity of conduct, he had never overlooked in his children or dependents the lightest disregard of his wishes. The Hatherleys had always been proud, clear-headed, just. All the organic qualities which had made his forefathers successful were crystallised in him. A psychologist might have wondered in what direction his children would develop, and argue badly from the fact that one of them, at least, had outraged every tradition. William, the second son, after a career of extravagance had enlisted in a West India regiment and was never mentioned. But in Marleyford psychologists were an unknown species. The good people of the little town judged exclusively from appearances, and were burdened with few theories. And appearances were so remarkably in favour of John and Mary Hatherley that it would have been difficult to have any doubts as to *their* future. The two handsome, correct, unexceptionable young people looked as though no evil could sink deeper into them than a fleck of dust into marble.

Mary, indeed, had had the faint beginnings of a love affair which bore a disturbing resemblance to the impetuosity and wrong-headedness of vulgar folk. She had engaged herself to her second cousin Ralph Mercer, a worthless spendthrift. He had been a ward of Mr. Hatherley's; but, quickly exhausting that gentleman's scanty store of patience, had been dismissed from the brewery in which he aspired to become a partner. "What will Miss Hatherley do?" was the source of some curiosity when this happened.

But Miss Hatherley apparently did nothing, only grew a little colder, a shade more reserved; and was supposed to be duly resigned.

As for John, whom he would marry was a question to which the answer was so long in coming that people had almost ceased to expect it. The greater part of his neighbours pronounced him a confirmed bachelor. He was over thirty and precise to a fault; moreover, he professed a mysterious affection for old editions of rare books.

John's acquaintances regarded his little library somewhat askant, or at best with the good-humoured contempt of people who are virtuously conscious of no definite superiority in themselves. And

it was remarked that the young man never aired his archaic scholarship in presence of his father. Mr. Hatherley was not a man to tolerate nonsense; that was well known. The best thing John had to do was to stick to the brewery, his skill in the management of which had proved him a chip of the old block.

One evening the Hatherleys were expecting guests to dinner. They gave solemn entertainments at regularly recurring intervals, and continued the practice even after Mr. Hatherley became an invalid. The large, low drawing-room was lighted with wax candles in silver sconces, while the gloom was further and still more picturesquely dissipated by the ruddy blaze of a glorious fire. Mary, seated by the hearth, was staring in silence—a somewhat moody silence, as it seemed—at the changing shapes in the glowing depths of heat. Every now and again her slender hands, clasped lightly together on her lap, moved restlessly, and her straight black brows met in a frown. Clearly her meditations were not pleasing. Opposite to her, blinking in a purblind, adoring, speechless way, like a superannuated King Charles, was Martha Freake.

Not that she was old, poor Martha, only her air was so humble and depressed, her face so crumpled with anxiety and love, her attire so dowdy, that she looked old. She was the Hatherleys' poor relation and housekeeper, and had lived with them since Mary had been left a motherless baby.

"Don't look so miserable, darling: it breaks my heart," she ventured to say, after a pause of sorrowful watching.

Mary shrugged her shoulders petulantly. "How can I help looking miserable, when I remember the state in which I saw him?" she retorted. Her tone was resentful, not to say sullen, and Martha quivered under it with an evident fear of having offended.

Before she could speak again the door opened to admit John. In evening dress he looked more majestic and unexceptionable than ever. "Good evening," he said, in mellow, measured tones, as he walked forward and established himself on the hearth-rug.

Both ladies responded, Mary almost inaudibly and without raising her head; Martha with a furtive, half-guilty glance.

"You have been to London?" said the latter, noticing that the young lady was not inclined to speak.

"Yes," answered John. "I heard of a Hague edition of Molière with original illustrations, and hurried up to buy it."

"And it took you three days to complete the purchase?" asked Mary suddenly; so suddenly that the question sounded like a challenge.

John pulled down his spotless cuffs, and flicked a speck of dust from the sleeve of his coat. "I had other business, but it was less important," he calmly replied.

"Business is an elastic term," continued Mary, while Martha turned pale and cast to her a look of imploring deprecation. "Whenever

men are bored at home, or have something to do which they do not care to talk about, it is easy to discover the necessity for a little trip, 'on business.'"

She did not speak the words angrily, for the Hatherley manner was always calm; nevertheless, in her tone there ran a sound which might have been described as spite.

John smiled, but not genially. "You speak with a certainty that would almost suggest some personal experience of such little 'business trips.' But naturally the idea is absurd—since you are not a man."

Not another word was spoken, until the butler threw open the door, announcing the Rector and his wife, "Mr. and Mrs. Stratton;" close upon the heels of whom followed "Mr. and Mrs. Ormerod," and "Mr. Russell."

Mr. Ormerod was a banker, *the* banker of Marleyford, and Walter Russell was his nephew. The latter, a refined, intelligent-looking young man, had, as was well-known, at one time proposed to Mary. Anyone watching him closely now as he wished her "good evening," would have guessed that he was still in love with her, but she showed not the faintest sign of any feeling—unless it were a little added weariness.

"We were almost afraid this morning that we should not be able to come, for Mrs. Ormerod received news of the illness of her brother," said the banker's loud and cheerful tones.

"Sir Charles?" asked the Rector in a concerned voice, for Mrs. Ormerod's brother was a baronet.

"Sir Charles, yes, by Jove! Serious thing you know, especially now, when young Charles is laid up with scarlatina at school."

During the significant little pause that followed this speech, one or two people's eyes travelled with a veiled curiosity towards Walter; who, in the event of his boy-cousin's death, would be next heir to the title. Martha looked meekly and regretfully at Mary; but Mary gave no sign of comprehension.

"I hope you had better news later in the day?" said Mr. Stratton.

"Somewhat better. I went by rail into Canterbury to get the despatch. No necessity in these days to wait twenty-four hours for news. We shall soon have a wire here, I am told; and a good thing too."

"I have never used the telegraph yet," remarked John.

"Oh, you are a Tory to the backbone, my dear fellow. As much behind the age as—as—('your furniture,' the laughing Mr. Ormerod was just about to add, but checked himself)—as if you were your own grandfather, by Jove."

John smiled gravely. To a Hatherley such an accusation was a compliment, and the banker knew it.

"Mr. John lives at home, and has all his dear ones near him," observed Mrs. Ormerod, who had something of a languishing air.

"He does not yet know the anxieties, any more than the joys of a family."

"And you all think that he never will: don't you?" asked Mary, speaking almost for the first time, and with a sudden, slight briskness. John pulled down his waistcoat and cleared his throat. His air seemed to say that the conversation was growing frivolous.

"Everybody almost appears to have been to Canterbury to-day," said the Rector. "I was there, and so were you, Miss Hatherley, and Miss Freake."

From John's calm eyes there flashed the faintest perceptible ray of interest. Miss Freake turned rapidly of various lively hues. Only Mary remained to all appearance unmoved.

"We went on a shopping expedition," she replied.

"The shopping expeditions of ladies are like the business trips of men—of very frequent occurrence," quietly put in her brother; and the sentence had so little meaning to most of the hearers that they took it for a joke and laughed.

Other guests entered, and at last nine couples filed off into the dining-room, which had the same sombre and old-fashioned air as the drawing-room. The dinner was served on massive plate; John carved, and old port circulated. The portrait of the founder of the family, clothed in municipal robes and bearing the civic chain, looked down upon the scene from his huge gold frame above the chimney-piece. He had been a handsome, striking looking man, and it was curious to see how like John was to him—like, but "with a difference." The original brow was broader; the lips were fuller; the lines of his face though stern were not so rigid, and there was a fuller life behind them. John's face was like a mask, impassible, and might cover weakness as well as strength.

He was speaking of his recent purchase, Mr. Ormerod listening with a polite, half-amused smile.

"Original engravings?" he repeated. "Ah! very interesting, I am sure. Don't know much about such things myself. Where do you pick up these books?"

"At various dealers. But often, also, from private persons. The late possessor of the Molière lived in ——"

"Linden-Grove Road," suggested Mary from her end of the table.

"By no means. At the opposite end of London," corrected John.

Martha, looking uneasy, quavered out in her odd, semi-senile way, "Linden-Grove Road, Mary dear? Why, you are thinking of the neighbourhood where Parsons lives."

"Parsons?" John asked, rather sharply.

"Don't you remember her? She was housekeeper here once, years ago. She is bedridden now, and I go to see her sometimes," said Martha, timidly.

"I am glad you go to see her," replied John serenely, and turned with some careless remark to the lady on his right.

There was a little sleepy talk in the drawing-room later; a little mild music; Walter Russell said a few earnest words to Mary, who was looking pale and fatigued; and then at ten o'clock everybody went home.

"Mary!" began John on returning to the drawing-room after seeing his guests off: but Mary had already slipped away, and only Martha was left. She was obviously uneasy, and looked more deprecating than ever. Her cousin resumed:

"You were in Canterbury to-day, I hear. I need not ask the reason. Of course you went to meet Ralph Mercer." Some surprise now succeeded to the fear on Martha's face; never had John spoken to her on that subject in a tone so removed from irritation.

"It was partly my fault that we went," she began, anxious still to shield her darling; but he interrupted her with a wave of his hand.

"I ask for no explanations and wish for none. Mary knows my wishes, and those of our father. If she chooses to run counter to both, I cannot help it. But I would like you, Martha, to try to convince her that my desire—my most earnest desire—is that she would treat me with frankness; and abandon once for all these clandestine meetings, and these paltry subterfuges which are as unworthy of herself as insulting to me."

Martha stared at him in the blankest astonishment. The one point on which she had ever ventured to think John less than perfect had been his conduct in regard to his sister's engagement. For it was he, quite as much as his father, who had driven young Mercer away. Could it be that he was relenting?

John resumed: "This Parsons? It is strange I do not remember her."

"She was here for a very short time in your school-days, and left to get married. Jacobs is a cousin of hers. It was through him that I first heard she was ill."

"Jacobs?" John took up the tongs, and carefully arranged the fire. Jacobs was the butler, and had been some years in the family. The young master of Hatherley House was certainly in a very genial mood to-night, for while, as a rule, he troubled himself little about the servants, on this occasion Jacobs and Jacobs' cousin appeared to possess a singular interest for him.

"And the poor thing is bedridden, Martha? I hope she is in good circumstances?"

"Yes," Martha said, "her husband is a pawnbroker."

"In the City?'

"No. In a street not very far from that Linden-Grove Road which they were speaking of at dinner."

"Ah, yes. What a strange, absent-minded question that was of Mary's! What could have made her think that dealers in old books lived up there?" continued John, carelessly enough, but directing,

nevertheless, at his companion a swift sidelong glance; which she did not see. Her thoughts were absorbed in considering how she could make John a request that, if granted, would fill Mary with joy, and earn for Martha that which she most coveted, the expression of Mary's gratitude.

She sat gazing into the fire, her breath coming quickly as the words of her petition alternately trooped to her lips; then retreated, unuttered.

"It is late," said John, at last; rousing himself from a gloomy reverie, and eyeing her discontentedly.

Martha rose; lighted his candle, and handed it to him; paused, and then, with a valiant rush, stammered out the words:

"John, poor Ralph is really starving."

"Let him starve, the lazy, worthless scoundrel!" exclaimed John, with a sudden flash of fire in his eyes, before which she shrank back as scared as by the blaze of a line of guns.

Bowing her head meekly, she murmured, "Good-night," and crept upstairs, mortified, crestfallen, and heavy-hearted.

John retired to his library. This was a very handsome room where, installed in a high-backed chair in front of a pretentious table, he was accustomed to spend many hours, presumably in study. The people who found him there were always impressed in spite of themselves. And when the grave young man, with a wave of his hand towards a quaint-looking volume in vellum, would remark that it was an Aldine, his hearer, profoundly ignorant of what an Aldine might be, looked at him with an expression curiously compounded of contempt and awe. With such a recondite work open before him, John was usually discovered; and such a work lay open upon his table now. Shutting it up with a brusqueness which certes no genuine lover of old books had ever used before him, he thrust it away, and sitting down upon his mediæval chair, abandoned himself to a reverie.

Martha meanwhile had gone to Mary's room, and found her sitting, still undressed, before the fire.

"Did you notice?" Mary cried exultingly, her eyes bright with some secret triumph.

"Notice? What?" asked Martha.

"His agitation when I mentioned Linden-Grove Road?"

Martha's hands fell to her side, and she stood mute with surprise.

"You good old owl!" laughed Mary. "I believe you never saw it."

She was quite right. Martha had not only not seen, but was still a hundred miles from comprehension.

"What does it all mean?" she asked.

"Never you mind, Patty. You are not clever at keeping secrets. They always oppress you. Suffice it to say that in future I shall know how to manage my immaculate brother."

Too humble-minded to be inquisitive, Martha waited further information. But Mary continued to talk in riddles.

"I wonder," she said musingly, "if I dare pretend to know enough to extract money out of him?"

"He will not give it, I think," said Martha, and related what had passed. Mary's face fell. Either she did love this Ralph very much, or a girlish fancy had been fanned by need of excitement and the spirit of opposition into a flame.

"You could squeeze out some money for me yourself, Patty, if you chose."

"I?" Poor Martha had nothing of her own but a miserable £60 a-year. As generous as she was poor, she spent more than the half of it in charity or in gifts, and never had a spare sixpence by the time each quarter was a week old.

"I never knew anybody like you for being without a penny," said Mary, crossly, seeing the distress painted on her cousin's countenance. "You have the housekeeping money. Why cannot you give me £10 out of that?"

"Mary!"

"Mary? Well, Mary what?" mocked the owner of that name with considerable peevishness.

"It would be dishonest."

"Dishonest? Nonsense. I would give it you back next week."

"Next week or next year, the wrong would be the same," answered Martha softly, while a steadfast light came into her brown eyes.

"I think you are very unkind." Martha winced but sat silent. "Very unkind and obstinate, and puritanical and—and ridiculous," continued the baffled beauty, and thereupon burst into tears.

A sound of angry sobbing alone broke the silence for the next few minutes. Martha was weeping also, but silently. Pale and sorrowful, she sat brushing away the tears as they coursed one by one down her cheeks, feeling herself dreadfully cruel, and yet upheld by a firm instinct of duty.

"You have often been most tiresome, Martha; but never, I think, deliberately unkind until now."

"The refusal is—is w——worse for me to make than for y——you to hear," wailed Martha, and broke out sobbing in her turn.

Tears are generally supposed to be a sign of weakness. Mary thought she had triumphed, and passed from reproach to entreaty. But although Martha grew damper, limper, more wretched every moment, she persisted in her resolution, and Mary ended by flying into a violent rage. Then Martha, trembling all over, crushed and mute, rose and bid her humbly "Good night." She got no answer, unless the peevish tattoo of an angry foot could be called such. She stood for a moment looking imploringly at the averted head of her darling; then glided away and went down the passage to her own room, feeling as if she could never be happy in all her life again. Her affections were so fresh, her heart was so pure, her mind so

simple, that harsh words and angry looks affected her as they would a child.

For hours after she was in bed she tossed from side to side, wondering what she could do. At last she had an inspiration. She had one possession of value; her mother's diamond ring. On the morrow she would pawn that to Parsons' husband and say nothing of her intention until she had the money in her hand, when she would win her pardon from Mary's glad surprise. Enchanted, she fell asleep at last, a smile upon her lips. Dreams were kinder to her than men. In the magic land of shadows the spell of fear fell from her spirit; her faith forgot the chill of doubt, and her own heart's music silenced discord.

CHAPTER II.

DISCOVERIES.

On reaching the station next morning to catch the first train, Martha was rather surprised to find John on the same errand. His journeys to London had grown frequent of late. Formerly one a month had, on an average, been enough for him. Now, hardly a week passed without his running up. Nevertheless, Martha had not expected to see him start again on this particular morning, for it was only on the previous afternoon that he had returned after a three days' absence.

Blind as a bat, as usual, she did not notice the slight shade of annoyance that crossed his face on perceiving her.

"Going shopping?" he inquired, carelessly, as he seated himself opposite to her.

She answered "Yes," rather quietly: for, as we know, shopping was not the only object of her journey.

"I am bound for the City," said he. "I suppose your destination is Oxford Street, and you will return by the two o'clock train?"

Martha thought she was quite sure to return at two o'clock, and said so.

"That will be too early for me," he remarked, as if the idea of accompanying her back had been the only reason of his question. And although railway speed was a much smaller thing in those days than it is in ours, he did not once again unclose his lips until the train steamed into the terminus.

Martha got through her shopping with the utmost haste, being eager to settle her business with Parsons. On descending at last from the Red Cap omnibus, and knocking at the door of the dingy house in the little street of shops that turned out of Linden-Grove Road, she was startled to find herself received by a weeping maid-of-all-work.

"What is the matter?" she asked, sympathetically, agitated always

at the sight of trouble, even though the sorrowful one was the grimiest of maidens that had ever scrubbed a doorstep.

"It's the missis, ma'am. She's in a faint. I thought you might have bin the doctor."

"Has a doctor not been?"

"No, ma'am, but he has sent to say he is coming. He's with a little boy in the Linden-Grove Road, who has got convulsions."

Martha, arriving upstairs, found the patient surrounded by her husband and one or two friendly female neighbours, who had resorted to such remedies as their simple science suggested. When the doctor presently made his appearance, Mrs. Parsons was quite sensible again, although so pale and exhausted that he feared a second attack. He recommended absolute quiet; and glanced analytically at the bystanders, with a view of discovering who among them was most likely to enforce the execution of his orders.

"*You* had better stay with her," he said, addressing Miss Freake. "Can you?"

"For a few hours," she replied, making up her mind to the loss of her afternoon.

"That's right. Then I will return in an hour or two. Should there be a relapse, and you want me in a hurry, you will most likely find me close by in Linden-Grove Road, No. 14. I have a bad case there, which requires watching."

As the illness of Mrs. Parsons has very little to do with our story, we may merely state that she had no second attack, and that about four o'clock Martha was able to leave her. Her husband, grateful to the little woman for her attention to the invalid, very quickly and liberally transacted the business of the ring, and Martha found herself the possessor of £10 and a pawn-ticket.

Greatly pleased with the success of her enterprise, she bid the sick woman good-bye, said a few kind words to everybody, and started forth bravely through the fog and drizzle for the Red Cap.

Her shortest way lay through Linden-Grove Road, and passing down that street, her tender heart reminded her of the little boy who, as the doctor had said, was so very ill. She began to wonder how he was, and peered about for No. 14. Not that she meant to go there, but she felt an interest in the house, knowing that a child's laughter had been hushed within its walls, and that sickness had stayed the busy tread of little feet and laid low a tiny head. "This must be No. 14," thought Martha, blinking through the mist. Yes—and surely that was the doctor who had just clinked open the garden-gate. He was coming away from a visit to his patient. She might give him news of Parsons, and ask him if the little boy were better.

She stopped at the gate with this intention. But the doctor did not notice her in the uncertain light, for he was speaking to a gentleman behind him.

"And you really think I can leave him with safety to-night?" asked a voice, whose tones rooted Martha to the ground with amazement.

"Indeed he is much better," replied the doctor. "Not only can you leave him, but I have impressed upon Mrs. Howard the necessity of seeking rest herself. She will break down entirely, otherwise."

"My wife is unfortunately of an anxious temperament," answered John: for John Hatherley it was who was leaning on the gate and saying these inconceivable things.

His wife? Martha with difficulty suppressed an exclamation of surprise and dismay. Surprise that John should be secretly married; dismay at the secrecy, and the consequent danger of detection. She shrank back into the shadow like a guilty thing, letting the doctor go past her unchallenged; and waited in a kind of dream until John's receding steps had died away upon the gravel walk.

Then she darted forward with but one idea, that of escape, nor did she breathe freely until she was once more seated in the omnibus and jolting back to the station; where she had to wait. The stupor of her recent discovery imprisoned her mind like a mould of lead, affecting her hardly less than if she had found John out in a crime. What kind of woman could he have married? And what would his father, what would everybody say, when discovery ensued? To our simple-minded Martha, steeped in the habits of the Hatherleys and imbued with their traditions, a clandestine marriage in connection with one of them seemed nothing less than highly improper. And how was she to behave under the weight of this astounding mystery? The thought of betraying John never presented itself to her. She was as loyal as she was loving; and in so far as silence could shield him, she was just as ready to stand by him now as in the old days, when he got into boyish scrapes, and her indulgent protection alone averted the birch. But surreptitious visits to the jam closet are one thing; a family hidden away in a remote suburb of London is another; and Martha nearly groaned aloud as she realised that all she could do for John now, her dear cousin, was to suffer for him in agonised silence and suspense.

Lest such feelings should seem exaggerated, it must be remembered that among the many believers in the Hatherley "legend," the staunchest, the most fervent, the most unquestioning, was Martha. No single thing ought to threaten the foundations of that rock of respectability: yet a clandestine connection implies something disgraceful.

She felt quite worn out with perplexity when she reached home at last, and was fairly past deriving any delight even from bestowing her £10 upon Mary.

"Where did you get it?" asked that young lady, surprise predominating over every other sentiment.

Martha, unable to fib, but blushing at the confession, ramblingly

recounted how she had pawned her mother's ring. Mary was touched, but not deeply, being accustomed to Martha's devotion.

"John has been to London again to-day," said Mary, kneeling down in front of her cousin, all her stateliness banished by secret exultation. "You saw him, I know, Martha. You came back in the same train with him."

"But not in the same carriage," replied Martha, who had indeed avoided John on her return, as though he had been plague-stricken.

"Was he alone at the London station—quite alone?" questioned Mary, with kindling eyes. "You say 'yes,' Patty, but you mumble the words in so odd a way that I vow I hardly believe you."

Martha cowered over the fire in silence. Did Mary know anything? And if so, how much?

"You are late," said John to her, presently, when he joined them in the room; and his eyes rested coldly on the meek little figure, almost as if he disapproved of her being still in her cloak and bonnet. "I thought you meant to return by the two o'clock train?"

"I—I was detained. It's—it's nearly dinner-time," stammered Martha, and hurried away, fearful of further questioning.

"One would almost think you had an interest in Martha's returning early," remarked Mary, looking straight into her brother's face.

"You are mistaken. Martha's movements have but a limited interest for me. *I* have never made her a confidante, nor employed her on clandestine errands," retorted John.

"Which means that I have," said Mary, tranquilly. "Union is strength, John. Why should you and I not make mutual confidences, with a view to mutual advantage?"

"You must demonstrate to me first the nature of the confidences which I could have to make," replied her brother, his marble face more inscrutable than ever.

She kept her eyes fixed on him for a space, then saying, "It will be your own fault if I am alienated," relapsed into silence.

It was a few weeks later that Martha and John found themselves alone at breakfast. The circumstance was not an unusual one, for Mr. Hatherley of course was never present, and Mary just now had reached that stage of a sentimental grievance which results in incapacity for all the minor tasks of life.

The post-bag had arrived, and John, after sorting the letters, was engaged in reading his own. He had handed the *Times* to his cousin, not for her own perusal, but to cut and smoothe for his, and if he thought of her at all, he probably supposed her to be taking the opportunity to glance at it. But Martha's mind, not intellectually inclined at the best of times, had no room in it at present for news of the Spanish marriages or any subjects of a kindred nature. Her eyes were fixed on John. Ever since the day of her exciting discovery, he had possessed a kind of fascination for her. Lately also,

certain circumstances had happened which had the effect of increasing Miss Freake's interest in him. His double existence as a bachelor in Marleyford, and a married man in London; his unaltered dignity and unruffled calm under the weight of such a fact, lifted him in her simple mind to an epic grandeur of audacity. She had fallen into the habit of watching him, quite unconscious of the annoyance it gave him and the sullen dislike which she was thus creating in his mind against her.

A thrill of absolute excitement ran through her now on noticing that one of John's letters seemed to cause him agitation. He changed colour visibly on reading the first lines, and turned hastily to the signature. That apparently did not afford him any satisfaction either, for he frowned angrily. Martha, her loving inquisitiveness fully roused, strained her short-sighted eyes in a vain endeavour to guess the nature of the communication. The writing was small and cramped —so much she could make out, and something in its general air had a queer, distorted kind of likeness to Mary's hand. This circumstance, which poor Martha had good cause to remember later, struck her now but for a passing moment, as a mere imperfect coincidence.

Convinced that the writing was a woman's, she was not slow in attributing it to the mysterious lady in Linden-Grove Road; and her imagination, always romantic, began to suggest a thousand possibilities. When John, rising at last, announced that he would have to go that day to London, and that he might not be back to dinner, Martha became more and more persuaded that some crisis had occurred in the clandestine establishment.

"If he would only tell me—trust to me! I might be of some use!" she thought pathetically, her glance following his tall figure, and affectionately dwelling on his inscrutable face.

"Thank ye! thank ye!" said John brusquely, as Martha, ridiculously too short, stood on tip-toe in a futile endeavour to help him with his great coat. He was cross and the attention bored him, while she lovingly excused all things in him, including petulance to herself.

He started for the door; then suddenly paused, and turned to address her.

"Martha, I hear Mr. Luscombe was here one day last week in my absence. Do you know why he came?" He asked the question with an air of great carelessness, but his eyes were watchful.

"Mr. Luscombe? He spoke with your father," murmured Martha, turning very red.

"Of course. But of what? Ah! I see you do not intend to enlighten me." And John, with a displeased expression, walked away.

Mr. Luscombe was the family lawyer, and he had of late paid one or two visits to Hatherley House. And Martha on her side had been rather oftener than usual to London. These two facts had reached John's knowledge and proved unwelcome. Her reserve did

not tend to put him in a better humour; on the contrary, it increased the vague feeling of irritation against her that he had been conscious of for weeks.

John had hardly left the house, when Mary appeared. Her breakfast and letters were always taken up to her, and she did not generally come down until late. But on this occasion she had seemingly been only waiting for her brother's departure to descend. She was looking pale yet exultant, and her eyes were bright with excitement.

"Patty," she began, with the charming grace that she displayed at times, and that her cousin always found irresistible, "tell me, did John seem annoyed by anything this morning?"

Martha was fain to admit that he did: and by dint of further questioning, Mary elicited the fact that it was a letter which had caused it.

"Patty, I want you to do me a favour," she said, later in the day.

"Anything you like, darling," replied her fervid and incautious slave.

"I wonder if I can trust you," continued Mary, contemplating her reflectively. "You make dreadful blunders sometimes, Patty."

Martha, oppressed by the consciousness of her stupidity, had nothing to say.

"I must risk it," said Mary, lowering her voice, confidentially. "I want you to go to the Post Office the day after to-morrow, and get a letter that will be lying there addressed to "X. Y. Z." You must bring it direct to me."

Mary had expected eager compliance, and was surprised to see no sign of it, but be met by silence. "Well?" she exclaimed, impatiently.

Martha's face presented a study of contending emotions. This was the second time that Mary had made a request to her which she found it difficult to grant. She feared, her secret knowledge rendering her imaginative, that some trap was being laid for John, and to that she could not be a party.

"This which you beg of me to do, is it anything unworthy?" she asked, shrinking from the question, even while she uttered it, because loth to hint at the shadow of evil in connection with Mary Hatherley.

That young lady became rather red, but also rather angry.

"You are so absurd of late," she exclaimed. "Of course it is nothing unworthy. Only a little piece of poetical justice; fun, in fact. I—that is—a friend of mine and myself, we wish to give my saintly brother a fright."

Martha looked grave. "You must tell me more."

"To tell you would spoil the whole," said Mary petulantly. "If you don't go, I shall send some one else, and then there is no knowing what mischief may ensue. Any stranger sent on such an errand would think that some important secret is concerned, and might open the letter. He would talk: and only imagine the effect of such talking in Marleyford!"

Martha made no immediate reply. Mary's words had for her a greater force than the speaker could guess. She had not, it is true, an idea of the nature of the letter or of the measure to which it could affect John; and, on the other hand, she dared not question. She feared by interrogation to excite suspicion and illuminate facts still wrapped up in darkness.

"You cannot refuse me such a little favour, Patty," began Mary once more, caressingly. The coaxing tone went to her cousin's heart. Still she could not yield at once. Mary entreated, repeating again and again that the letter must be withdrawn, "if not by Martha, then by somebody else."

"If I bring you the letter, what will you do with it?" asked the yielding woman.

"Tear it up," answered Mary with a light laugh, that yet was a little forced.

"You promise," questioned Martha, looking at her earnestly.

"I promise," replied the girl: though her glance flickered.

Martha sighed. But love and anxiety for those she loved combined to vanquish her; and Mary, triumphant, finally extracted from her the promise that she would go.

But the day came, and Miss Freake went, no letter was forthcoming. Mary, much disappointed, insisted on her promise to go again at the end of another few days.

So one fine morning, when the air was balmy, although the trees were still leafless, and when crocuses and snowdrops had suddenly revealed themselves in all the gardens, Martha started off once more, the post-office her final destination. First she had many small errands of business and of charity to perform; some bills to pay, some bedridden crones to visit. Blither than usual, the cloud of humble depression that generally clung around her gentle spirit a little lifted, she trotted from place to place. Perhaps it was the soft, lovely weather that made her feel so bright; for Martha Freake was very sensitive to external impressions. Far more sensitive, indeed, than most people, looking carelessly at her crumpled little face under her dowdy bonnet, thought it worth while to guess. Poor simple, loving Martha!

At last she turned into the street where the post-office was; presented herself before the clerk, and asked for a letter addressed "X Y Z." It was handed out to her. With a spasm of surprise, she recognised the handwriting of the address for John's. Hastily thrusting the mysterious missive into her pocket, she turned and found herself face to face with a quiet-looking stranger. What he had to say to her, and what happened next, the curious reader will learn in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III.

THE WILL.

UPSTAIRS, in a warm, comfortable, remote room, where the bustle and stir of the household could not reach, Mr. Hatherley spent his days. They were monotonous, drowsy days, saddened by weakness and the sense of an imminent end.

The brewer had never possessed many mental resources: never had been a reading man, or made his son's pretensions to culture.

Now, as the gloom of weakness and of age gathered round his spirit, he had but one occupation. That was, to go over and over again in memory the details of long past business operations. His mind was very clear, but his vivid interest in present things as a rule had vanished. Generally silent and a little morose, rather than patient and resigned, he would flash out at intervals into energy or anger. And his intelligence on these occasions was still so keen, his views so decided, his will so swift and strong, that the whole household shrank from rousing the slumbering lion. His restless irritability and proportional sharpness of insight kept his children and servants on thorns, for the lightest word sufficed to annoy, and the faintest indication to enlighten him.

Late one afternoon he sat at his usual place by the fire, the landscape still dimly visible through the unshuttered windows. The reflection of the blaze on walls and furniture became ruddier by contrast with the shadows which it could only partially chase. The servant on bringing the lamp had been bidden to take it away again. Silently, almost humbly, he obeyed, for the day had been one of Mr. Hatherley's worst; and now he was supposed to have sunk into the semi-stupor which generally followed his outbursts of excitement.

He had a rugged, stern old face—the set face of a man who had known few although strong emotions and responded to fewer ideas. But now on the sunken cold lips a softer expression than usual dwelt. Once or twice the wrinkled hands trembled, and an open letter which they held rustled as in answer to some quiver of the aged frame.

"All in the dark, father?" exclaimed Mary, entering suddenly. "How careless of Jacobs!" And she rang the bell.

The old man did not seek to justify Jacobs, or to answer. He still seemed lost in thought. Mary glanced at him rather impatiently, and no quick instinct of love warned her of the subtle change in his air. Her mind was, as always, full of her own affairs. Earlier in the day she had almost decided to appeal to him for money; but his mood had been ungracious, and her courage failed.

When the lights were brought in, he roused himself a little, and, lifting his eyes, fixed them on his daughter with a singular, wistful look, almost of tenderness. She was startled—even shivered with a

vague awe. Never before had he so looked at her; and recalling the mystic change that sometimes precedes death, she wondered whether it were some prescience of his end that now filled her father's eyes with that strange regretfulness.

She laid her hand on his wrinkled, trembling fingers, generally so nerveless, and felt them close kindly, although feebly, round her own.

"You are like your mother to-night, my dear, it seems to me," he said. "Or perhaps it is only that I have been living all day in the past."

"Can I do anything for you, father? Is there anything you want?" asked Mary, oppressed by the silence and by her own unwonted emotion. Her shallow nature could not long bear the strain of a painful feeling. She wished he would take those wan, solemn, regretful eyes from her face.

"I have thought of you a great deal to-day," he resumed, the senile trembling of his lips increasing as the slow words came through them; "of you and Will. I have been reading his last letter; that one in which he says he is about to marry. You remember?"

"Yes; you said it was certain to be a marriage to disgrace us," said Mary jealously, for there had been scant love between herself and her younger brother, and she had no desire to see him reinstated in her father's favour.

"Ay," answered Mr. Hatherley; "I said so, I remember. But things seem different now. I should like him to be happier than he has been."

"He does not deserve much happiness that I can see," replied Mary, too angry now for tenderness.

"I have been unjust to him, and not generous to you, my dear. I was over-persuaded."

"By John?" cried Mary, a sudden light breaking upon her.

"Yes," he answered musingly. "John is hard, but I thought him just, and I had faith in him until now. Lately——"

He paused, and his head drooped again. Mary was livid with excitement at the thought of the danger she had barely escaped—nay, which, perhaps, still hung over her head. Should she tell that secret something she knew of her brother, or would silence be wiser? Resentment and self-interest alike urged her to speak.

"Father, I have a thing to tell you—a secret of John's," she said, grasping the old man's arm in the intensity of her eagerness.

He lifted his eyes to hers, but they had a wandering look which alarmed her. Were the shades of death already obscuring his tardily-awakened conscience? Was he drifting away so fast that her touch could no longer detain, her voice no longer reach him? In a spasm of fear she fell on her knees beside him.

"I should like to reverse the will," he murmured. "But perhaps I have no time."

The whispered, mournful words sickened Mary. What had he

done? Was she to be left penniless? Springing up, she hastily collected pens, ink, and paper. "Dictate!" she exclaimed. "I can write and you can sign it."

Once again succeeded a moment of that terrifying silence, during which, breathless, she leant forward and peered into his face. But it was the slow gathering together of his enfeebled faculties that made the pause; for suddenly he roused himself and in clear tones, with a steadfast look began to dictate.

"February 10th, 184—. Besides the minor legacies mentioned in my latest will, I leave to my daughter Mary, and to my son William, £30,000 each for their own exclusive use and benefit. The remainder of my real and personal estate I leave in the manner already set forth."

His voice ceased. Mary looked up. Before she could speak, he stretched out his hand towards the pen.

"Call Jacobs and Gregory as witnesses. Be quick, child. I think the sands are slipping fast."

She flew to the bell, and its summons not being answered rapidly enough for her impatience, sped down the staircase calling "Jacobs! Jacobs!" at the top of her voice.

"Quick!" she cried, when half-a-dozen startled servants came running. "Jacobs, come! Somebody call Gregory. Your master wants two witnesses to his signature to a will."

"A will? At the eleventh hour, as you may say, poor gentleman—what a freak!" commented Mrs. Hoare, the housekeeper, while she despatched an underling for Gregory, the gardener, and Jacobs followed his excited young mistress upstairs.

Mary, of course, was the first to gain the room, and then Jacobs heard her give a shrill cry of astonishment and dismay. On putting in his questioning countenance, Jacobs found Mr. Hatherley in his usual attitude by the fire, Mary standing speechless in the middle of the floor, and upon the hearth-rug, quietly warming himself, imperturbably irreproachable, was—John!

The two servants, who had now come, could not take in the full meaning of the scene, for they felt that there was some mystery, and remained staring, silent and puzzled.

"What is the matter?" inquired John affably.

Jacobs looked at Gregory, and Gregory at him; after which, both directed glances at their young mistress. But she seemed dumbfounded, and vouchsafed not a word.

"Miss Mary said, sir, that we were wanted to witness a will," replied Jacobs respectfully.

"A will?" repeated John sharply. "What will? My father's? I think you are all mad."

Then Mary, beside herself, burst out. "I tell you the codicil was there . . . . on that table . . . . a codicil destroying your frauds. You have taken it. Give it back."

Her words came out in gasps. She was half-suffocated with an emotion which, in all her decorous life, she had never felt or shown before. At last she positively rushed at her brother, as if to wrest the truth from him; but he seized her by the wrists and held her at arms' length, his cold contemptuous eyes scanning her face.

"You are disgracing yourself, Mary. You are dreaming. Where is the codicil? Look for it," he concluded quietly.

Where was it indeed?

Mary turned imperiously to her father, but even her anger shrank from questioning him; for he was sitting back in his chair quite silent and still, with a fascinated look of horror in his eyes, and a trembling of his whole frame inexpressibly painful to see. The scene was evidently too much for his failing strength, and it was more than likely that whatever he knew he would not tell. On the floor was a crumpled sheet of paper. Mary pounced upon it, but threw it away again the next moment, on finding that it was only William's letter. Her hungry eyes turned to the fire, but no trace of any consumed document was there; so again she faced her brother. He had never taken his gaze off her, and now spoke as calmly as before.

"You are convinced of your folly, I hope? No? Then I am tired of it, and I think the servants had better withdraw."

Gregory and Jacobs took the hint, and vanished. Mary cast herself upon a sofa, sobbing. John stood by with a gloomy frown. All at once, across the stormful silence, Mr. Hatherley spoke. "I wish," he said, slowly and distinctly, "to be left alone."

Both his children started with a momentary sense of remorse. The quiet command so feebly yet so authoritatively spoken, falling into the midst of their sordid self-absorption, was like a voice from the tomb.

"Come to your room," said John to his sister, who had stayed her sobs and risen. "I have to speak to you seriously, and we worry my father. You will ring for Hoare if you want her, sir:" and John, after a keen, dissatisfied glance, crossed the room and bolted the door communicating with the servants' staircase.

Signing to Mary to follow him, he led the way to her bed-room, and closed the door. "It is nearly dinner-time," he began. "Has it struck you as strange that Martha should still be out?"

Martha? The subject was so unexpected at that moment, that Mary absolutely stared. "I have had other things on my mind," she replied sullenly.

"She did not return to lunch, and she will not be here to dinner," said John. "It seems you have heard nothing?"

"Nothing at all; nobody has called to-day," answered Mary slowly, looking at him with a growing feeling of disaster. She did not wish to ask what had happened; but he remained silent, and she could not bear the suspense.

"Where is Martha?"

"In jail."

Mary shrieked. The words were like a stab. But even then it was the blow to herself of the announcement which she felt most of all.

"Cruel! cruel!" she cried, and covered her face with her hands.

"The cruelty belongs to the person who sent her on a felonious errand," retorted John. "I was amazed when I heard of it. Mr. Ormerod called himself at the brewery about it, twice. The first time I was out; and this and other delays made it impossible to get her out on bail to-day. But to-morrow, when she is brought up for examination, I shall of course do what I can for her, although I am myself the prosecutor."

Mary sat listening, half-stunned, to the cold, commonplace words; commonplace in their meaning, and as John uttered them, but tragic in their significance to her. Two questions kept recurring constantly to her, beating against her brain like hammers. "What would happen to herself? and what to Ralph?"

"Do you wish Martha to remain under this charge?" he asked.

"I?" she repeated faintly.

"She has only been your tool: and, as I believe, your innocent tool," continued John. "If I state this conviction before the magistrates to-morrow, she will be discharged."

Mary wrung her hands. All the consequences to herself were beginning to dawn upon her.

"I need not point out, that disgrace will fall on you, even though you are not arrested as Ralph Mercer's accomplice," he pursued unrelentingly. But if Mary had not brains she had some courage, and his tone stung her to revolt.

"You are trying to frighten me with your talk of felony and punishment, John. But after all, what the letter said was perfectly true. You have a clandestine establishment and you wish to keep it a secret."

"That is quite true. But the mistake you and Ralph made was in menacing me, supposing that I would pay a large price for the secret to be kept." Mary started. This was a new aspect of the question.

"To my wife, herself (for the lady in Linden-Grove Road is my wife), nobody could make any objection. But I will not conceal from you that there are circumstances connected with her which might render my father angry at the marriage ——"

"And leave you out of his will," interrupted Mary, with scorn.

"Precisely."

His coolness exasperated her. Her eyes flashed, and she was about to make some angry observation when he raised his hand to impose silence.

"Let us talk frankly, Mary. If I am in your power to a degree of which, observe, you are ignorant, *you* are in *my* power to an extent of which I am fully aware. Martha, poor soul, between bewilderment

and loyalty, said very little to-day, and nothing that could compromise you. But she evidently counts upon you to release her from her present position, and it is impossible to say how long her silence may last when she finds herself mistaken. Her story, to the prejudiced ears of Marleyford—prejudiced in our favour," said John, with an air of sardonic satisfaction—"will probably at first strike everybody as wildly improbable, but its ultimate acceptance will largely depend upon me. If I state my conviction that my cousin was my sister's cat's-paw, I fancy our kind neighbours and friends will, one and all, accept the succulent morsel of scandal whole. Martha will be pitied as a victim and exalted as a martyr; I shall bring my wife, her existence no longer a secret, in triumph home; while you, my dear—well! I leave you to imagine the figure, more novel than edifying, that you will cut."

Mary was speechless with dismay and rage. In the last few minutes she had lived through a decade of mental experience. She saw her respectability in men's eyes—that elaborate fabric built up of family tradition and personal pride—threatened to its foundations; she was frightened for her lover, frightened for herself, a little remorseful about Martha; and aghast, to the point of pain, at the unexpected revelation of her brother's true character.

"I—I declare I do not know you," she exclaimed.

"You do not know me because this is the first time in our lives that the clash of antagonistic interests has brought out the essential difference between us. If you will have confidence in me—good. If not, Mary, you will have nobody but yourself to blame for anything unpleasant that may happen to you."

Her nerves irritated by his stern composure, his calm superiority, Mary again sought refuge in tears. He let her sob for a little while. "Now, Mary, for the question of the money. I have just detected you in the attempt to obtain a codicil by undue influence."

"My father volunteered to make it," she flashed out, restored to some momentary energy.

"The proof? Let me tell you that a codicil in your own favour and *your own handwriting*, would look very suspicious in the eyes of the law. And why do you object to the original will?"

"For aught I know I am disinherited," she said, falling into the trap laid for her, and betraying her real ignorance of her father's intentions.

John indulged in a smile of quiet triumph; and as he had learnt all he needed to know, he was gratified at this moment to hear the clash of the gong.

"Seven o'clock, I declare! Come, Mary, dry your eyes, and be reasonable. You will certainly make ducks and drakes of any money which is left you; but at the same time, if it be any comfort to you to know that you will not starve, of that I can assure you. You are in a hole, and so is Ralph, for that affair of the letter is criminal; but

if I am pleased with you, I will stand your friend. And we will get Martha off also—call her insane, perhaps."

Cowed afresh by this reiteration of the danger hanging over her, Mary rose, sulkily, but obediently, and accompanied her brother downstairs. There the respectful Jacobs was waiting for them, and the dinner began in its usual form.

But it was not destined to be thus concluded. All at once the silent brother and sister were startled by the sound of a heavy fall in the room above, which was Mr. Hatherley's sitting-room. They looked at one another with questioning eyes, and John half rose from his seat, listening.

At this moment in rushed Mrs. Hoare, pale and scared. "Oh, sir! the master! . . . he is lying insensible! . . . I think he is dead."

When the son and daughter reached their father's side, they found him lost to all consciousness, but still breathing. The doctor, summoned in haste, pronounced the attack to be a fresh seizure, and declared his conviction that it was destined to be the last; which sent the whole house into a commotion.

In point of fact, the old man never rallied, and, just when the dawn was breaking, he went. John was calm, but grave and attentive; Mary, shattered with fatigue, and worn out by a quick succession of emotions, quite subdued.

"Now, don't take on, my dear," said Mrs. Hoare, forgetting something of her acquired respect in her native motherliness. "What is it you say? If he had only spoken again? Well, well, the ways of Providence are mysterious. And it is quite certain the poor gentleman loved you, and if he had been unjust, his intention was likely to remedy it. Or I should not have found him standing where I did," concluded the good woman, smoothing her apron with a casual air.

"What do you mean?" asked Mary, raising her tear-stained face.

"You heard the fall? Yes. Well, I had gone into the room that instant. Poor master, he was standing by his writing-table, with his hand on the very drawer from which Mr. John has just carried a bundle of documents into his own room. He turned as I came in and said, 'Mrs. Hoare,' he says, 'later this evening, when Jacobs is free——' Then he stopped. 'Yes, sir?' says I, thinking he had only just stopped to reflect, may be. But he stood like a statue—his hand just raised. Miss, it was awful. It was as if he was listening to a distant voice. Then all at once his poor face was drawn, he gave a little gasp, and before I could catch him he had fallen in a heap upon the floor. And, Miss Mary, he never spoke again."

This story of Mrs. Hoare's preoccupied Mary. She, as well as the housekeeper, had seen John remove a bundle of papers from a drawer of his father's writing-table and take them to his own room. Was the codicil among these? If so, John's first care would of course be to destroy it. Mary knew that an unsigned codicil was not of

much legal value, but a thought, sharpened by resentment, suggested to her that it might be of some use in enabling her to dispute her father's will, should that prove, as she feared, too flagrantly unjust. What was her father doing at the writing-table when Mrs. Hoare found him there? In the state of inertness and weakness in which he was, he must have had some strong motive to impel him to the exertion of creeping across the room. Perhaps he had had possession of the codicil all the time and had taken advantage of being alone to conceal it, intending to get the servants to witness it later.

All at once it flashed across Mary's mind that this writing-table of her father's possessed a curious secret drawer. Ralph Mercer had told her of it. He had heard of it from William Hatherley, who, coming unexpectedly once into his father's study, had caught sight of it ere the old man had hastily and furtively closed it. William confessed to having taken an occasion to look for it, but in spite of many shakings and rappings he had been completely baffled. And the one chance which enabled him to make his search had never repeated itself. William, wisely distrustful of his brother, had carefully kept from him all knowledge of his discovery, although to his "chum," Ralph, he had been frank. Mary, recalling all this, asked herself: Could the codicil be there? She longed to find it, unable to believe that it would not be of some use.

John had gone out in the course of the morning about the necessary arrangements, and except for the servants she was alone in the house. The opportunity was too good to be lost, and she went to the rooms where her father had spent his last sad and silent months. A little shudder of awe came over her as she glanced at the fireless hearth, the empty arm-chair, at all the familiar unchanged objects whose special use was gone. With a superstitious shrinking she softly closed the door, left ajar, of the darkened bed-room, where lay the still presence so full of rebuke in its unconscious majesty; and then she began her search.

But it was as fruitless now for her, as it had ever been for William: she could not hit upon the secret of the drawer. Such papers as she found she scanned eagerly, but there were none of any importance: John had taken care of that. Feeling herself foiled, Mary leant her face upon her hands and began to weep silently. She was thoroughly exhausted, and felt dreadfully sorry for herself. She recalled the touch of new kindness towards her in her father's tone and manner the day before, and sobbed bitterly. Nobody was ever so lonely as she: even Martha was not there to comfort her: she had been taken into custody on suspicion of having written the threatening letter.

Selfishly confiding in John's assurance that Martha could be "got off somehow," Mary had dismissed as much as possible from her mind the thought of Miss Freake's present position. Now it recurred to her, and with it a sense of her own baseness. She was just in one of those moods when to think oneself vile seems equal to

a return to virtue. Crossness with the world produced in Mary an inclination to defy it. It would be grand of her, and it would startle Marleyford, if she were publicly to proclaim Martha's innocence and her own guilt. She began to rehearse the scene in her mind. She would appear before the magistrates, looking very interesting in her mourning, and in clear tones she would state the truth. She could not be punished very severely after that; John would be defrauded of his intention of putting her down; Mrs. Hoare's story would help her in threatening to dispute the will. John would have to compound for a large sum of money; and she—well, she and Ralph would marry and take the grateful Martha home to live with them. The picture was charming. It quite cheered her, and she rose to her feet with a sense of heroism.

But a thought intervened. Had not John said that Martha would be brought up again before the magistrates this very morning? In that case the time for action was *now*. This check, like a brigand with a cocked pistol on a lonely road, brought Mary up rather suddenly. She still felt inspired, only inspired for some less definite epoch—perhaps to-morrow or next day. While she hesitated and began to get rather ill-tempered, Jacobs knocked at the door. The diversion was a relief. "Come in," she said.

"Mr. Russell is in the library, Miss Mary. He wishes to know if he can do anything for you."

"I will see him," said Mary: and, as well as the lowered blinds would allow, she scanned herself in the glass to see if her tears had disfigured her. She did not care for Walter Russell; but it was gratifying to know that he was devoted to her, more especially as everybody admired him, and wondered why she did not prefer him to Ralph Mercer. As she went downstairs it occurred to her that perhaps she might make her first confession about Martha to him. It would be a pretty scene—she remorseful, more sinned against than sinning; he touched and tender and very indulgent. He would smooth her after-path, and stand between her and blame.

Paler than usual, with a graver but a gentler manner and an air of lovely languor, she entered the library and responded to Mr. Russell's moved and eager greeting. Her stateliness always impressed him, and now that it was informed with this new graciousness he found it irresistible.

"I fear you are very sad," he said kindly, and held her hand. Mary sighed. She had a retrospective vision of herself as she had been ten minutes previously in her father's room, and felt that she was indeed very, very sad.

"I am glad you came. I was upstairs," she murmured; and Walter, who understood her, pressed her hand sympathizingly.

"You are well?" said Mary, looking at him with a keener appreciation than usual of his refined and intelligent air. "And your little cousin, Sir Charles's son, how is he?"

"He is, I fear, dying," replied Walter gravely.

"Dying?" Mary was startled. If the boy died, Walter would be heir-presumptive to a baronetcy. Her opinion of him rose considerably.

"I am afraid there is very little chance for the poor child, but I did not come here to talk of my own affairs," he said. "I want to know, Miss Hatherley, if I can be of any service to you. I have been so shocked to hear, not only of your loss, but of this terrible business of Miss Freake's. Surely there must be some mistake?"

Mary's heart seemed to stand still. Now was her opportunity; now or never. She felt that her next words would seal her fate, as a soul with some possibility of redemption or as the basest of liars.

There are these unchronicled crises in life that count for more than death or ruin. Mary Hatherley felt herself in the grip of a grim reality. The act of justice which, dressed in fantastic guise, had seemed easy of accomplishment an instant before, now stared at her with a terrible earnestness out of Mr. Russell's honest eyes. Never until this moment had she realized her folly, or felt that it was irrevocable. With a sob of impotent anger against herself and everybody, that admirably simulated pain, she bowed her head upon her arms and gave up truth for ever.

(To be continued.)

THE CHRISTMAS ANGELS.

Lo, the festival is ready! wake the bells to merry madness,
Hang aloft the shining garlands, lift aloud your voices, while
The fingers of a master bid the organ soar to gladness,
And roll triumphant pæans down the nave and pillared aisle.
But in vain we raise the anthem, in vain we twine the holly,
Even mirth will pall upon us ere its echoes shall have ceased,
For groundless are the revels, and too near akin to folly,
If the holy Christmas angels be not bidden to the feast.

Do you know them, O my sister? their eyes are full of pity
For the suffering and the fallen that around thy pathway throng.
Do you hear them, O my brother? through the hubbub of the city,
They whisper "Quench thine anger, and forgive the cherished wrong!"
'Tis no wayward flight of fancy that sweet and unseen faces
Are watching every homestead, the greatest and the least;
In the meanest one among them, and in the world's high places,
Let the holy Christmas angels be bidden to the feast.

SYDNEY GREY.

THE EBONY BOX.

IN one or two of the papers already written for you, I have spoken of "Lawyer Cockermuth," as he was usually styled by his fellow townspeople at Worcester. I am now going to tell of something that happened in his family; that actually did happen, and is no invention of mine.

Lawyer Cockermuth's house stood in the Foregate Street. He had practised in it for a good many years; he had never married, and his sister lived with him. She had been christened Betty; it was a more common name in those days than it is in these. There was a younger brother named Charles. They were tall, wiry men with long arms and legs. John, the lawyer, had a smiling, homely face; Charles was handsome, but given to be choleric.

Charles had served in the militia once, and had been ever since called Captain Cockermuth. When only twenty-one he married a young lady with a good bit of money; he had also a small income of his own; so he abandoned the law, to which he had been bred, and lived as a gentleman in a pretty little house on the outskirts of Worcester. His wife died in the course of a few years, leaving him with one child, a son, named Philip. The interest of Mrs. Charles Cockermuth's money would be enjoyed by her husband until his death, and then would go to Philip.

When Philip left school he was articled to his uncle, Lawyer Cockermuth, and took up his abode with him. Captain Cockermuth (who was of a restless disposition, and fond of roving), gave up his house then and went travelling about. Philip Cockermuth was a very nice steady young fellow, and his father was liberal to him in the way of pocket-money, allowing him a guinea a week. Every Monday morning Lawyer Cockermuth handed (for his brother) to Philip a guinea in gold; the coin being in use then. Philip spent most of this in books, but he saved some of it; and by the time he was of age he had sixty golden guineas put aside in a small round black box of carved ebony. "What are you going to do with it, Philip?" asked Miss Cockermuth, as he brought it down from his room to show her. "I don't know what yet, Aunt Betty," said Philip, laughing, "I call it my nest-egg."

He carried the little black box (the sixty guineas quite filled it), back to his chamber and put it back into one of the pigeon-holes of the old-fashioned bureau which stood in the room, where he always kept it, and left it there, the bureau locked as usual. After that time, Philip put his spare money, now increased by a salary, into the Old Bank; and it chanced that he did not again look at the ebony box of gold,

never supposing but that it was safe in its hiding-place. On the occasion of his marriage some years later, he laughingly remarked to Aunt Betty that he must now take his box of guineas into use; and he went up to fetch it. The box was not there.

Consternation ensued. The family flocked upstairs; the lawyer, Miss Betty, and the captain—who had come to Worcester for the wedding and was staying in the house—one and all put their hands into the deep, dark pigeon-holes, but failed to find the box. The captain, a hot-tempered man, flew into a passion and swore over it; Miss Betty shed tears; Lawyer Cockermuth, always cool and genial, shrugged his shoulders and absolutely joked. None of them could form the slightest notion as to how the box had gone or who was likely to have taken it, and it had to be given up as a bad job.

Philip was married the next day, and left his uncle's house for good, having taken one out Barbourne way. Captain Cockermuth felt very sore about the loss of the box, he strode about Worcester talking of it, and swearing that he would send the thief to Botany Bay if he could find him.

A few years more yet, and poor Philip became ill. Ill of the disorder which had carried off his mother—decline. When Captain Cockermuth heard that his son was lying sick, he being (as usual) on his travels, he hastened to Worcester and took up his abode at his brother's—always his home on these visits. The disease was making very quick progress indeed; it was what is called "rapid decline." The captain called in all the famed doctors of the town—if they had not been called before: but there was no hope.

The day before Philip died, his father spoke to him about the box of gold. It had always seemed to the captain that Philip must have, or ought to have, *some* notion of how it went. And he put the question to him again, solemnly, for the last time.

"Father," said the dying man—who retained all his faculties and his speech to the very end—"I declare to you that I have none. I have never been able to set up any idea at all upon the loss, or attach suspicion to a soul, living or dead. The two maids were honest; they would not have touched it; the clerks had no opportunity of going upstairs. I had always kept the key safely, and you know that we found the lock of the bureau had not been tampered with."

Poor Philip died. His widow and four children went to live at a pretty cottage on Malvern Link—upon a hundred pounds a year, supplied to her by her father-in-law. Mr. Cockermuth added the best part of another hundred. These matters settled, Captain Cockermuth set off on his rovings again, considering himself hardly used by Fate at having his limited income docked of nearly half its value. And yet some more years passed on.

This much has been by way of introduction to what has to come. It was best to give it.

Mr. and Mrs. Jacobson, our neighbours at Dyke Manor, had a

whole colony of nephews, what with brothers' sons and sisters' sons; of nieces also; batches of them would come over in relays to stay at Elm Farm, which had no children of its own. Samson Dene was the favourite nephew of all; his mother was sister to Mr. Jacobson, his father was dead. Samson Reginald Dene he was christened, but most people called him "Sam." He had been articled to the gentleman who took to his father's practice; a lawyer in a village in Oxfordshire. Later, he had gone to a firm in London for a year, had passed, and then came down to his uncle at Elm Farm, asking what he was to do next. For, upon his brother-in-law's death, Mr. Jacobson had taken upon himself the expenses of Sam, the eldest son.

"Want to know what you are to do now, eh?" cried old Jacobson, who was smoking his evening pipe by the wide fire of the dark-wainscoated, handsome dining parlour, one evening in February. He was a tall, portly man with a fresh-coloured, healthy face; and not, I dare say, far off sixty years old. "What would you like to do?—what is your own opinion upon it, Sam?"

"I should like to set up in practice for myself, uncle."

"Oh, indeed! In what quarter of the globe, pray?"

"In Worcester. I have always wished to practise at Worcester. It is the Assize town: I don't care for pettifogging places: one can't get on in them."

"You'd like to emerge all at once into a full-blown lawyer there? That's your notion, is it, Sam?"

Sam made no answer. He knew by the tone his notion was being laughed at.

"No, my lad. When you have been in some good office for another year or two maybe, then you might think about setting-up. The office can be in Worcester if you like."

"I am hard upon twenty-three, Uncle Jacobson. I have as much knowledge of law as I need."

"And as much steadiness also, perhaps?" said old Jacobson.

Sam turned as red as the crimson table-cover. He was a frank-looking, slender young fellow of middle height, with fine wavy hair almost a gold colour and worn of a decent length. The present fashion—to be cropped as if you were a prison-bird and to pretend to like it so—was not favoured by gentlemen in those days.

"You may have been acquiring a knowledge of law in London, Sam; I hope you have; but you've been kicking up your heels over it. What about those sums of money you've more than once got out of your mother?"

Sam's face was a deeper red than the cloth now. "Did she tell you of it, uncle?" he gasped.

"No, she didn't; she cares too much for her graceless son to betray him. I chanced to hear of it, though."

"One has to spend so much in London," murmured Sam, in lame apology.

"I dare say! In my past days, sir, a young man had to cut his coat according to his cloth. We didn't rush into all kind of random games and then go to our fathers or mothers to help us out of them. Which is what you've been doing, my gentleman?"

"Does aunt know?" burst out Sam in a fright, as a step was heard on the stairs.

"I've not told her," said Mr. Jacobson, listening—"she is gone on into the kitchen. How much is it that you've left owing in London, Sam?"

Sam nearly choked. He did not perceive this was just a random shot: he was wondering whether magic had been at work.

"Left owing in London?" stammered he.

"That's what I asked. How much? And I mean to know. 'Twon't be of any use your fencing about the bush. Come! tell it in a lump."

"Fifty pounds would cover it all, sir," said Sam, driven by desperation into the avowal.

"I want the truth, Sam."

"That is the truth, uncle, I put it all down in a list before leaving London; it comes to just under fifty pounds."

"How could you be so wicked as to contract it?"

"There has not been much wickedness about it," said Sam, miserably, "indeed there hasn't. One gets drawn into expense unconsciously in the most extraordinary manner up in London. Uncle Jacobson, you may believe me or not, when I say that till I added it up, I did not think it amounted to twenty pounds in all."

"And then you found it to be fifty! How do you propose to pay this?"

"I intend to send it up by instalments, as I can."

"Instead of doing which, you'll get into deeper debt at Worcester If it's Worcester you go to."

"I hope not, uncle. I shall do my best to keep out of debt. I mean to be steady."

Mr. Jacobson filled a fresh pipe, and lighted it with a spill from the mantel-piece. He did not doubt the young fellow's intentions; he only doubted his resolution.

"You shall go into some lawyer's office in Worcester for two years, Sam, when we shall see how things turn out," said he presently. "And, look here, I'll pay these debts of yours myself, provided you promise me not to get into trouble again.—There, no more"—interrupting Sam's grateful looks—"your aunt's coming in."

Sam opened the door for Mrs. Jacobson. A little pleasant-faced woman in a white net cap, with small flat silver curls under it. She carried a small basket lined with blue silk, in which lay her knitting.

"I've been looking to your room, my dear, to see that all's comfortable for you," she said to Sam, as she sat down by the table and

the candles. "That new housemaid of ours is not altogether to be trusted. I suppose you've been telling your uncle all about the wonders of London."

"And something else, too," put in old Jacobson gruffly. "He wanted to set up in practice for himself at Worcester: off-hand, red-hot!"

"Oh dear!" said Mrs. Jacobson.

"That's what the boy wanted, nothing less. No. Another year or two's work in some good house, to acquire stability and experience, and then he may talk about setting up. It will be all for the best, Sam; trust me."

"Well, uncle, perhaps it will." It was of no use for him to say perhaps it won't: he could not help himself. But it was a disappointment.

Mr. Jacobson walked over to Dyke Manor the next day, to consult the Squire as to the best lawyer to place Sam with, himself suggesting their old friend Cockermuth. He described all Sam's wild ways (it was how he put it) in that dreadful place, London, and the money he had got out of amidst its snares. The Squire took up the matter with his usual hearty sympathy, and quite agreed that no practitioner in the law could be so good for Sam as John Cockermuth.

John Cockermuth proved to be agreeable. He was getting to be an elderly man then, but was active as ever, save when a fit of the gout took him. He received young Dene in his usual cheery manner, upon the day appointed for his entrance, and assigned him his place in the office next to Mr. Parslet. Parslet had been there more than twenty years; he was, so to say, at the top and tail of all the work that went on in it, but he was not a qualified solicitor. Samson Dene was qualified, and could therefore represent Mr. Cockermuth before the magistrates and what not: of which the old lawyer expected to find the benefit.

"Where are you going to live?" he questioned of Sam that first morning.

"I don't know yet, sir. Mr. and Mrs. Jacobson are about the town now, I believe, looking for lodgings for me. Of course they couldn't let *me* look; they'd think I should be taken in," added Sam.

"Taken in and done for," laughed the lawyer. "I should not wonder but Mr. Parslet could accommodate you. Can you, Parslet!"

Mr. Parslet looked up from his desk, his thin cheeks flushing. He was small and slight, with weak brown hair, and had a patient, sad sort of look in his face and in his meek, dark eyes.

James Parslet was one of those men who are said to spoil their own lives. Left alone early, he was looked after by a bachelor uncle, a minor canon of the cathedral, who perhaps tried to do his duty by him in a mild sort of manner. But young Parslet liked to go his own ways, and they were not very good ways. He did not stay at any calling he was put to, trying first one and then another; either

the people got tired of him, or he of them. Money (when he got any) burnt a hole in his pocket, and his coats grew shabby and his boots dirty. "Poor Jamie Parslet! how he has spoilt his life!" cried the town, shaking its pitying head at him: and thus things went on till he grew to be nearly thirty years of age. Then, to the public astonishment, Jamie pulled up. He got taken on by Lawyer Cockermuth as copying clerk at twenty shillings a week, married, and became as steady as Old Time. He had been nothing but steady from that day to this, had forty shillings a week now, instead of twenty, and was ever a meek, subdued man, as if he carried about with him a perpetual repentance for the past, regret for the life that might have been. He lived in Edgar Street, which is close to the cathedral, as everybody knows, Edgar Tower being at the top of it. An old gentleman attached to the cathedral had now lodged in his house for ten years, occupying the drawing-room floor; he had recently died, and hence Lawyer Cockermuth's suggestion.

Mr. Parslet looked up. "I should be happy to, sir," he said; "if our rooms suited Mr. Dene. Perhaps he would like to look at them?"

"I will," said Sam. "If my uncle and aunt do not fix on any for me."

Is there any subtle mesmeric power, I wonder, that influences things unconsciously? Curious to say, at this very moment Mr. and Mrs. Jacobson were looking at these identical rooms. They had driven into Worcester with Sam very early indeed, so as to have a long day before them, and when breakfast was over at the inn, took the opportunity, which they very rarely got, of slipping into the cathedral to hear the beautiful ten o'clock service. Coming out the cloister way when it was over, and so down Edgar Street, Mrs. Jacobson espied a card in a window with "Lodgings" on it. "I wonder if they would suit Sam?" she cried to her husband. "Edgar Street is a nice, wide, open street, and quiet. Suppose we look at them?"

A young servant-maid, called by her mistress "Sally," answered the knock. Mrs. Parslet, a capable, bustling woman of ready speech and good manners, came out of the parlour, and took the visitors to the floor above. They liked the rooms and they liked Mrs Parslet; they also liked the moderate rent asked, for respectable country people in those days did not live by shaving one another; and when it came out that the house's master had been clerk to Lawyer Cockermuth for twenty years, they settled the matter off-hand, without the ceremony of consulting Sam. Mrs. Jacobson looked upon Sam as a boy still. Mr. Jacobson might have done the same but for the debts made in London.

And all this, you will say, has been yet more explanation; but I could not help it. The real thing begins now, with Sam Dene's sojourn in Mr. Cockermuth's office, and his residence in Edgar Street.

The first Sunday of his stay there, Sam went out to attend the morning service in the Cathedral, congratulating himself that that grand edifice stood so conveniently near, and looking, it must be confessed, a bit of a dandy, for he had put a little bunch of spring violets into his coat, and "button-holes" were quite out of the common way then. The service began with the Litany, the earlier service of prayers being held at eight o'clock. Sam Dene has not yet forgotten that day, for it is no imaginary person I am telling you of, and never will forget it. The Reverend Allen Wheeler chanted, and the prebendary in residence (Somers Cocks) preached. While wondering when the sermon (a very good one) would be over, and thinking it rather prosy, after the custom of young men, Sam's roving gaze was drawn to a young lady sitting in the long seat opposite to him on the other side of the choir, whose whole attention appeared to be given to the preacher, to whom her head was turned. It is a nice face, thought Sam; such a sweet expression in it. It really was a nice face, rather pretty, gentle and thoughtful, a patient look in the dark brown eyes. She had on a well-worn dark silk, and a straw bonnet; all very quiet and plain; but she looked very much of a lady. Wonder if she sits there always? thought Sam.

Service over, he went home, and was about to turn the handle of the door to enter (looking another way) when he found it turned for him by somebody who was behind and had stretched out a hand to do it. Turning quickly he saw the same young lady.

"O, I beg your pardon," said Sam, all at sea; "did you wish to come in here?"

"If you please," she answered—and her voice was sweet and her manner modest.

"O," repeated Sam, rather taken aback at the answer. "You did not want me, did you?"

"Thank you, it is my home," she said.

"Your home?" stammered Sam, for he had not seen the ghost of anybody in the house yet, save his landlord and landlady and Sally. "Here?"

"Yes. I am Maria Parslet."

He stood back to let her enter; a slender, gentle girl of middle height; she looked about eighteen, Sam thought (she was that and two years on to it), and he wondered where she had been hidden. He had to go out again, for he was invited to dine at Lawyer Cockermuth's, so he saw no more of the young lady that day; but she kept dancing about in his memory. And somehow she so fixed herself in it, and as the time went on so grew in it, and at last so filled it, that Sam may well hold that day as a marked day—the one that introduced him to Maria Parslet. But that is anticipating.

On the Monday morning all his ears and eyes were alert, listening and looking for Maria. He did not see her; he did not hear a sound of her. By degrees he got to learn that the young lady was

resident teacher in a lady's school hard by; and that she was often allowed to spend the whole of the day at home on Sundays. One Sunday evening he ingeniously got himself invited to take tea in Mrs. Parslet's parlour, and thus became acquainted with Maria; but his opportunities for meeting her were rare.

There's not much to tell of the first twelvemonth. It passed in due course. Sam Dene was fairly steady. He made a few debts, as some young men, left to themselves, can't help making—at least, they'd tell you they can't. Sundry friends of Sam's in Worcester knew of this, and somehow it reached Mr. Cockermuth's ears, who gave Sam a word of advice privately.

This was just as the first year expired. According to agreement, Sam had another year to stay. He entered upon it with inward gloom. On adding up his scores, which he deemed it as well to do after his master's lecture, he again found that they amounted to far more than he had thought for, and how he should contrive to pay them out of his own resources he knew no more than the man in the moon. In short, he could not do it; he was in a fix; and lived in perpetual dread of its coming to the ears of his Uncle Jacobson.

The spring assize, taking place early in March, was just over; the judges had left the town for Stafford, and Worcester was settling down again to quietness. Miss Cockermuth gave herself and her two handmaidens a week's rest—assize time being always a busy and bustling period at the lawyer's, no end of chance company looking in—and then the house began its spring cleaning, a grand institution with our good grandmothers, often lasting a couple of weeks. This time, at the lawyer's house, it was to be a double bustle; for visitors were being prepared for.

It had pleased Captain Cockermuth to write word that he should be at home for Easter; upon which, the lawyer and his sister decided to invite Philip's widow and her children also to spend it with them; they knew Charles would be pleased. Easter Day was very early indeed that year, falling at the end of March.

To make clearer what's coming, the house had better have a word or two of description. You entered from the street into a wide passage; no steps. On the left was the parlour and general sitting-room, in which all meals were generally taken. It was a long, low room, its two rather narrow windows looking to the street, the back of the room being a little dark. Opposite the door was the fire place. On the other side the passage, facing the parlour door, was the door that opened to the two rooms (one front, one back) used as the lawyer's office. The kitchens and staircase were at the back of the passage, a garden lying beyond; and there was a handsome drawing-room on the first floor, not much used.

The house, I say, was in a commotion with the spring cleaning, and the other preparations. To accommodate so many visitors

required contrivance: a bed-room for the Captain, a bed-room for his daughter-in law, two bed-rooms for the children. Mistress and maids held momentous consultations together.

"We have decided to put the three little girls in Philip's old room, John," said Miss Betty to her brother, as they sat in the parlour after dinner on the Monday evening of the week preceding Passion Week; "and little Philip can have the small room off mine. We shall have to get in a child's bed, though; I can't put the three little girls in one bed; they might get fighting. John, I do wish you'd sell that old bureau for what it will fetch."

"Sell the old bureau!" exclaimed Mr. Cockermuth.

"I'm sure I should. What good does it do? Unless that bureau goes out of the room we can't put the extra bed in. I've been in there half the day with Susan and Ann, planning and contriving, and we find it can't be done any way. Do let Ward take it away, John; there's no place for it in the other chambers. He'd give you a fair price for it, I dare say."

Miss Betty had never cared for this piece of furniture, thinking it more awkward than useful: she looked eagerly at her brother, awaiting his decision. She was the elder of the two; tall, like him; but while he maintained his thin, wiry form, just the shape of an upright gas post with arms, she had grown stout with no shape at all. Miss Betty had dark thick eyebrows and an amiable red face. She wore a "front" of brown curls with a high and dressy cap perched on the top of it. This evening her gown was of soft twilled shot-green silk, a white net kerchief was crossed under its body, and she had on a white muslin apron.

"I don't mind," assented the lawyer, as easy in disposition as Miss Betty was; "it's of no use keeping it that I know of. Send for Ward and ask him, if you like, Betty."

Ward, a carpenter and cabinet maker, who had a shop in the town and sometimes bought second-hand things, was sent for by Miss Betty on the following morning; and he agreed, after some chaffering, to buy the old bureau. It was the bureau from which Philip's box of gold had disappeared—but I dare say you have understood that. In the midst of all this stir and clatter, just as Ward betook himself away after concluding the negotiation, and the maids were hard at work above stairs with mops and pails and scrubbing brushes, the first advance guard of the visitors unexpectedly walked in: Captain Cockermuth.

Miss Betty sat down in an access of consternation. She could do nothing but stare. He had not been expected for a week yet; there was nothing ready and nowhere to put him.

"I wish you'd take to behave like a rational being, Charles!" she exclaimed. "We are all in a mess; the rooms upside down, and the bed-side carpets hanging out at the windows."

Captain Cockermuth said he did not care for bed-side carpets,

he could sleep anywhere—on the brewhouse bench if she liked. He quite approved of selling the old bureau, when told it was going to be done.

Ward had appointed five o'clock that evening to fetch it away. They were about to sit down to dinner when he came, five o'clock being the hour for late dinners then in ordinary life. Ward had brought a man with him and they went upstairs.

Miss Betty, as carver, sat at the top of the dinner-table, her back to the windows, the lawyer in his place at the foot, Charles between them, facing the fire. Miss Betty was cutting off the first bone of a loin of veal when the bureau was heard coming down the staircase, with much bumping and noise.

Mr. Cockermuth stepped out of the dining-room to look on. The captain followed: being a sociable man with his fellow townspeople, he went to ask Ward how he did.

The bureau came down safely, and was lodged at the foot of the stairs; the man wiped his hot face, while Ward spoke with Captain Cockermuth. It seemed quite a commotion in the usual quiet dwelling. Susan, a jug of ale in her hand, which she had been to the cellar to draw, stood looking on from the passage; Mr. Dene and a younger clerk, coming out of the office just then to leave for the evening, turned to look on also.

"I suppose there's nothing in here, sir?" cried Ward, returning to business and the bureau.

"Nothing, I believe," replied Mr. Cockermuth.

"Nothing at all," called out Miss Betty through the open parlour door. "I emptied the drawers this morning."

Ward, a cautious man and honest, drew back the lid and put his hand in succession into the pigeon-holes; which had not been used since Philip's time. There were twelve of them; three above, and three below on each side, and a little drawer that locked in the middle. "Halloa!" cried Ward, when his hand was in the depth of one of them: "here's something."

And he drew forth the lost box. The little ebony box with all the gold in it.

Well now, that was a strange thing. Worcester thinks so, those people who are still living to remember it, to this day. How it was that the box had appeared to be lost and was searched for in vain over and over again, by poor Philip and others; and how it was that it was now recovered in this easy and natural manner, was never explained or accounted for. Ward's opinion was that the box must have been put in, side upwards, that it had in some way stuck to the back of the deep, narrow pigeon-hole, which just about held the box in width, that those who had searched took the box for the back of the hole when their fingers touched it, and that the bumping of the bureau now in coming downstairs had dislodged the box and brought it forward. As a maker of bureaus, Ward's opinion was listened to

with deference. Anyway, it was a sort of theory, serving passably well in the absence of any other. But who knew? All that was certain about it was the fact; the loss and the recovery after many years. It happened just as here described, as I have already said.

Sam Dene had never heard of the loss. Captain Cockermuth, perfectly beside himself with glee, explained it to him. Sam laughed as he touched with his forefinger the closely-packed golden guineas, lying there so snug and safe, offered his congratulations, and walked home to tea.

It chanced that on that especial Tuesday evening, matters were at sixes and sevens in the Parslets' house. Sally had misbehaved herself and was discharged in consequence; and the servant engaged in her place, who was to have entered that afternoon, had not made her appearance. When Sam entered, Maria came out of the parlour, a pretty blush upon her face. And to Sam the unexpected sight of her, it was not often he got a chance of it, and the blush and the sweet eyes came like a gleam of Eden, for he had grown to love her dearly. Not that he had owned it to himself yet.

Maria explained. Her school had broken up for the Easter holidays earlier than it ought, one of the girls showing symptoms of measles; and her mother had gone out to see what had become of the new servant, leaving a request that Mr. Dene would take his tea with them in the parlour that evening, as there was nobody to wait on him.

Nothing loth, you may be sure, Mr. Dene accepted the invitation, running up to wash his hands, and give a look at his hair, and running down in a trice. The tea-tray stood in readiness on the parlour table, Maria sitting behind it. Perhaps she had given a look at *her* hair, for it was quite more lovely, Sam thought, more soft and silken than any hair he had ever seen. The little copper kettle sang away on the hob by the fire.

"Will papa be long, do you know?" began Maria demurely, feeling shy and conscious at being thus thrown alone into Sam's company. "I had better not make the tea until he comes in."

"I don't know at all," answered Sam. "He went out on some business for Mr. Cockermuth at half-past four, and was not back when I left. Such a curious thing has just happened up there, Miss Parslet!"

"Indeed! What is it?"

Sam entered on the narrative. Maria, who knew all about the strange loss of the box, grew quite excited as she listened. "Found!" she exclaimed. "Found in the same bureau! And all the golden guineas in it!"

"Every one," said Sam: "as I take it. They were packed right up to the top!"

"Oh, what a happy thing!" repeated Maria, in a fervent tone that rather struck Sam, and she clasped her fingers into one another, as one sometimes does in pleasure or in pain.

"Why do you say that, Miss Parslet?"

"Because papa—but I do not think I ought to tell you," added Maria, breaking off abruptly.

"Oh yes, you may. I am quite safe, even if it's a secret. Please do."

"Well," cried the easily-persuaded girl, "papa has always had an uncomfortable feeling upon him ever since the loss. He feared that some people, knowing he was not well off, might think perhaps it was he who had stolen upstairs and taken it."

Sam laughed at that.

"He has never *said* so, but somehow we have seen it, my mother and I. It was altogether so mysterious a loss, you see, affording no clue as to *when* it occurred, that people were ready to suspect anything, however improbable. Oh, I am thankful it is found!"

The kettle went on singing, the minutes went on flitting, and still nobody came. Six o'clock struck out from the cathedral as Mr. Parslet entered. Had the two been asked the time, they might have said it was about a quarter-past five. Golden hours fly quickly; fly on angels' wings.

Now it chanced that while they were at tea, a creditor of Sam's came to the door, one Jonas Badger. Sam went to him: and the colloquy that ensued might be heard in the parlour. Mr. Badger said (in quite a fatherly way) that he really could not be put off any longer with promises; if his money was not repaid to him before Easter he should be obliged to take steps about it, should write to Mr. Jacobson, of Elm Farm, to begin with. Sam returned to the tea-table with a wry face.

Soon after that, Mrs. Parslet came in, the delinquent servant in her rear. Next, a friend of Sam's called, Austin Chance, whose father was a solicitor in good practice in the town. The two young men, who were very intimate and often together, went up to Sam's room above.

"I say, my good young friend," began Chance, in a tone that might be taken for jest or earnest, "don't you go and get into any entanglement in that quarter."

"What d'you mean now?" demanded Sam, turning the colour of the rising sun.

"I mean Maria Parslet," said Austin Chance, laughing. "She's a deuced nice girl; I know that; just the one a fellow might fall in love with unawares. But it wouldn't do, Dene."

"Why wouldn't it do?"

"Oh, come now, Sam, you know it wouldn't. Parslet is only a working clerk at Cockermuth's."

"I should like to know what has put the thought in your head?" contended Sam. "You had better put it out again. I've never told you I was falling in love with her; or told herself, either. Mrs. Parslet would be about me, I expect, if I did. She looks after her as one looks after gold."

"Well, I found you in their room, having tea with them, and——"

"It was quite an accident; an exceptional thing," interrupted Sam.

"Well," repeated Austin, "you need not put your back up, old fellow; a friendly warning does no harm. Talking of gold, Dene, I've done my best to get up the twenty pounds you wanted to borrow of me, and I can't do it. I'd let you have it with all my heart if I could; but I find I am harder up than I thought for."

Which was all true. Chance was as good-natured a young man as ever lived, but at this early stage of his life he made more debts than he could pay.

"Badger has just been here, whining and covertly threatening," said Sam. "I am to pay up in a week, or he'll make me pay—and tell my uncle, he says, to begin with."

"Hypocritical old skinflint!" ejaculated Chance, himself sometimes in the hands of Mr. Badger—a worthy gentleman who did a little benevolent usury in a small and quiet way, and took his delight in accommodating safe young men. A story was whispered that young M., desperately hard-up, borrowed two pounds from him one Saturday night, undertaking to repay it, with two pounds added on for interest, that day month; and when the day came and M. had not got the money, or was at all likely to get it, he carried off a lot of his mother's plate under his coat to the pawnbroker's.

"And there's more besides Badger's that is pressing," went on Dene. "I must get money from somewhere, or it will play the very deuce with me. I wonder whether Charley Hill could lend me any?"

"Don't much think so. You might ask him. Money seems scarce with Hill always. Has a good many ways for it, I fancy."

"Talking of money, Chance, a lot has been found at Cockermuth's to-day. A boxful of guineas that has been lost for years."

Austin Chance stared. "You don't mean that box of guineas that mysteriously disappeared in Philip's time?"

"Well, they say so. It is a small, round box of carved ebony, and it is stuffed to the brim with old guineas. Sixty of them, I hear."

"I can't believe it's true; that *that's* found."

"Not believe it's true, Chance! Why I saw it. Saw the box found, and touched the guineas with my fingers. It has been hidden in an old bureau all the time," added Sam, and he related the particulars of the discovery.

"What an extraordinary thing!" exclaimed young Chance: "the queerest start I ever heard of." And he fell to musing.

The "queer start," as Mr. Austin Chance was pleased to designate the resuscitation of the box, did not prove to be a lucky one. But the strange complications it entailed and the disastrous troubles that followed, must be told of next month.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

AN OLD RHYME.

IN a very old edition of the diary kept by Dr. Burney during his travels, the following quaint verse, said to be by the English violinist, Davis Mell, is inscribed:

"Fair Italia plays the guitar, while the castanet pleases proud Spain;
Lively France touches softly her lute; Erin's harp wails her bondage, her slain;
The German his trumpet blows loud; England's violin steals out your soul;
The fife for the Swiss, the drum for the Dutch—the fiddle out-values the whole."

To all appearance the violinist Peter Salomon, a born German, had chosen this ditty for his watchword in the year 1789; at which time, he being appointed Royal Musical Director in London, proceeded to organise in Hanover Square those concerts now so well-known under the name of "The Philharmonic." For these he industriously gathered together from all quarters the most excellent of available performers, vocal and instrumental.

The old rhyme hung in great letters over his work-table; the words "the German his trumpet blows loud," being underscored with red ink. Salomon's eyes went continually in this direction. The line was a grievous offence to him. In it his beloved musical Fatherland was mocked at, and depreciated; and the fact that to Switzerland and Holland only a fife and drum had been allotted proved in no way comforting. In the deepest depths of his heart he had sworn an oath never to rest until he had either discovered in Germany the most wonderful of all trumpeters or had gathered together such an assemblage of Teutonic musicians as would astonish the world.

His orchestra was now almost perfect, and he continually entertained the public with some novelty, and brought hither, with his wand, artists from many distant climes. He could have been happy at his vocation had he never met with this wretched verse. But of late vexation had ever been gnawing at his heart. His Germany which had produced already a Glück, a Handel, a Mozart—that it should be held up to the scorn of Englishmen as a country of trumpeters!

Having duly or unduly fretted over this matter, the Director at length, in the autumn of 1789, resolved to revisit his home; to see how things were with his own eyes; to hear with his own ears; to recruit for his greatest concert; or to find his super-excellent trumpeter, in envy and admiration of whose strains all England was to ring.

Salomon went direct to Vienna. He desired much to make the

acquaintance of Joseph Haydn, whose beautiful music was daily becoming better known and admired. The Director resolved to pay his first visit in the city to this composer. The task of finding him was not, however, so easy as he had expected. He had to seek long and to ask many questions before making sure of the identity of the very modest dwelling in which he was at length positively informed the great man dwelt.

Joseph Haydn, at this time, was Kapellmeister and musical director to Prince Esterhazy, who paid him for his services at the rate of 400 gulden a-year. His duties were manifold. He was conductor, composer, copyist and music-master. He taught personally every performer in his orchestra. From morning till evening he was rushing about on the business of his "dear master," as he always, with grateful simplicity, called the Prince. It was only late at night he could find an hour to himself, in which to jot down on paper a few of the many incomparable musical thoughts ever flowing through his gentle soul.

Well for Haydn that he was of a happy, peaceful and contented spirit. His serenity all came from within. In his home, even, there was much to irritate and disturb. His wife was of a restless and excitable temperament, more likely to need than to diffuse calmness. But her Joseph was a very fountain of inward bliss. Trouble passed over his head as clouds come and go in May. A melancholy glance, a deep sigh, then an effort, and all was forgiven and forgotten. He wrote down any injury that was done him on the sands of speedy oblivion; but a benefit received was engraved upon the pure metal of his faithful heart for ever. He had many tempting offers of preferment, but he could not be induced to leave the Prince. "I owe everything to my dear master," he would say. "All I do pleases him. I should be ungrateful if I left; I am a monarch within my little kingdom, and can make what experiments I like, and can watch the effect of any novelty I introduce. I am apart from the noisy world, and yet I am always busy. What more can I desire?"

Thus, as the years went by, he continued his studying, teaching, directing, copying and practising upon the many instruments at which he had made himself a proficient.

As he went from place to place where business called him, he always had a genial word for one or another, or could find time to caress a pretty child, to gather a wayside flower, or to bestow a trifle in alms; and was never seen without a smile upon his lips—the fragrant halo, as it were, of the new-born melody floating through his brain.

It was only in the autumn and winter months that Haydn lived in Vienna. During the summer he and the Prince resided at Eisenstadt, in Hungary. It was while travelling thither and back that most of Joseph's principal works were composed. Besides his symphonies and quartets, during these years of service under the Prince, he gave the world his nineteen operas, his fifteen masses, his first

oratorio, "Dido," his Seven words upon the Cross, and his 163 pieces for the viola di bardone, his master's favourite instrument. What amazing activity! Peter Salomon knew the whole story well. As he thought it over, now, his eagerness to see Haydn face to face grew in intensity.

He was doomed to be disappointed, however. The master was not at home. A servant showed the visitor through a narrow hall into a small sitting-room, and left him there, to listen and watch for Joseph's return. Salomon examined his surroundings with that lively interest we all feel in those things amongst which one lives to whom we cleave in love or admiration. The furniture was poor and shabby. A small spinet stood in one corner, and near it lay a goodly heap of music. Flowers grew in the window, and a bird-cage hung above them. The great musician never forgot to water the plants or to notice his canary. It was an especial favourite, and often pecked at his fingers as he sat at work.

Salomon waited for an hour. The pet songster chirped and twittered. The harvest sunshine streamed through the casement, transforming this plain, small room into a golden palace, and causing a splendid diamond ring upon the wealthy Director's finger to flash and sparkle. The visitor drew it off, and put it to hide for a while within his waistcoat pocket. He did not wish to look too fine here in this humble but honourable dwelling. Some sudden feeling of shame at his own prosperity took possession of him. But no Haydn appeared, and the watcher at length grew weary of lingering, and began to remember that in all probability visitors were even now inquiring for him at his hotel.

He left the house, and slowly began to retrace his steps, meditating again, as he went, upon that ever-haunting and irritating rhyme. It was no consolation to him that Dr. Burney winds up his remarks upon Germany by confessing that in spite of its cold, unattractive landscape, its badly-paved streets, and its rough custom-house officers, it is yet quite possible to live contentedly and merrily in the Rhineland.

As he went along, and for the hundredth time, muttered indignantly to himself those obnoxious words, "The German his trumpet blows loud," the sound of that very instrument suddenly smote upon his ear. A wonderful peal came wafting towards him, floating, or as it were, forced forth from the uncongenial confinement of some narrow room close at hand.

Salomon soon found the house from which the music came, and identified the performers. Two men stood together. One listened in a respectful and admiring attitude. The other, who was slender and spiritual-looking, blew; and as he did so Peter Salomon's heart throbbed and swelled. It seemed to him that he stood in a battle-field; banners floated; horses impatiently pawed the ground; hosts of courageous men rushed forward, and a mighty shout, "Forward

for our King and Fatherland! The Lord is on our side!" rent the air.

The window at which the listener stood was open. The Director stepped inside with eager haste, and put forth his hand upon the slight man's shoulder. "Found! Found!" he exclaimed. "You must come back to England with me. There cannot be a second trumpeter in the world like you."

The musician put his instrument down, and turned a wondering glance upon the impetuous speaker.

The latter began again. "Yes, yes," he proceeded in a reassuring tone; "I am in earnest. I do not jest. I am the Royal Musical Director in London. I can make your fortune for you. I have been searching for a spendid solo trumpeter and have found you in the nick of time. I will certainly take you back to England with me."

The other smiled. He was as calm as the speaker was excited. "It is impossible," he said softly. "I have no time. I have, as you see, to teach my pupils myself, for my name is Haydn—Joseph Haydn."

One year later, however, Prince Esterhazy died, and Salomon then succeeded in inducing this great man to come over to London for one of the Hanover Square concert evenings. On this occasion Haydn conducted the performance of one of his own symphonies, to the delight of an applauding audience. He was not the only German musician present who then did honour to his country. A singer named Gertrude Mara was universally allowed to be the Prima Donna of the day, and to have distinguished herself far above all the Italian and French singers then in England.

During the supper party which wound up the night, the Director read out Dr. Burney's old rhyme, and told, amid much laughter and applause, the story of his hunt after a trumpeter. Haydn was chuckling with the rest, when his fair countrywoman, the Queen of Song, quickly rose from her seat, hastened to him, and kissed him on the lips, putting a hand, the while, on each side of his head, and thereby dispersing a cloud of powder. All the other ladies present followed her example; and Joseph afterwards declared this was the prettiest and pleasantest ovation he had ever received.

It was during his stay in England that Haydn composed his best oratorio.

NARISSA ROSAVO.

THE CRUISE OF THE RESERVE SQUADRON.

By Charles W. Wood,

Author of "Through Holland," etc.

THE Squadron of the First Reserve, under command of Admiral H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh, was to sail for her six weeks' cruise on the 15th June, 1882.

Once a year the First Reserve Squadron takes a cruise for the drill and exercise of those men who form the Reserve strength of our Navy in times of emergency; and in days of peace, as coastguardsmen, protect the shores of our island from surprise of the enemy or fear of smuggling.

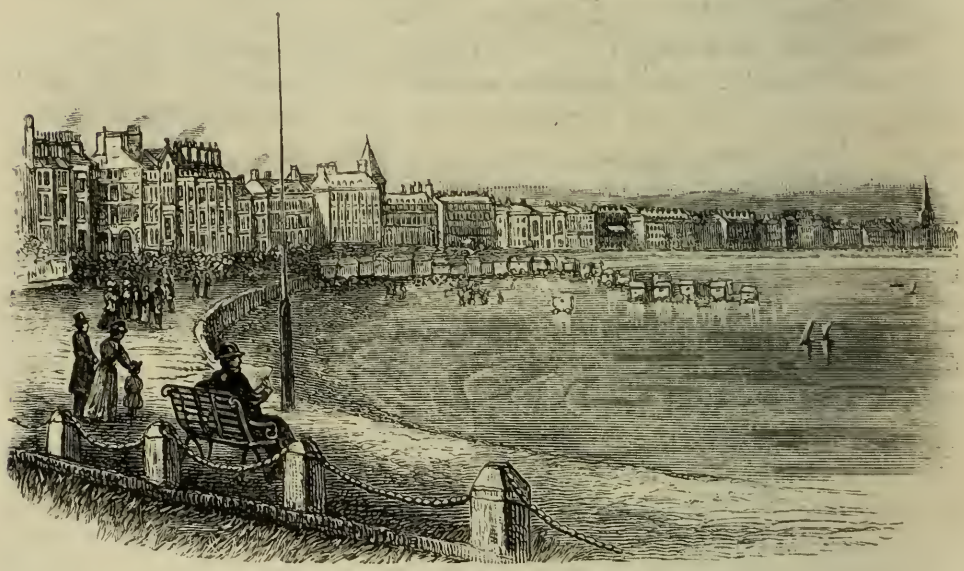
About half the number are drafted each year into the eight vessels of war comprising the Squadron of the First Reserve. Thus, every coastguardsman, up to a certain age, has his turn once in two years. About four thousand men, in addition to the ships' company, join the Squadron for each cruise.

A more delightful cruise for anyone who has the somewhat exceptional privilege of sailing with the Squadron as a guest, cannot be imagined. The mere fact of the group of eight men-of-war constantly maintaining their position and their line, is sufficient to give unusual interest to the voyage. It banishes all idea of monotony; throws life into your surroundings; adds beauty and dignity to the waters the vessels ride so steadily and so proudly. Morning after morning, coming up on deck, still you find each vessel in her appointed place. You grow familiar with every outline, note every point of beauty: where one vessel excels another or falls short, as the case may be. In a rough sea, especially, you discover that two at least out of the eight have the gift or grace of rolling: and if there is no "fine frenzy" about them, can as much be said of the small and select few in the Squadron who have not yet gained full possession of their sea legs?

In the day time, at the mast-head of every vessel a man is ever on the watch. From his vantage-ground he can sweep the seas and give timely warning of every danger that might be looming in the distance. Forewarned is forearmed. If there is any chance of collision, it quickly passes away. Should a Van Tromp come down upon us with an Armada and an inverted besom—we are ready for him, and he and his vessels turn tail and run home. At night there are five "look-out" men stationed in different parts of the ship, whose gruff voices are heard at the strike of every bell, notifying that they are on the alert, and whose duty it is to report any light or vessels round the horizon. Thus we enjoy a perpetual and pleasant feeling of perfect safety.

The daily drill and exercise, the tactics and manœuvres, form other

points of interest in the cruise. And here, while every vessel contributes her share of the spectacle (in manœuvres for instance, and in sail drill) each vessel is independent of the others. There is nearly always something going on; something to be done or to be seen. And the intervals of inaction are an interregnum of peace and quietness, inexpressibly delicious. There is an unusual charm in the moments of repose on board a man-of-war. The whole sweep of an immense deck is stretched before you. Every rope, every pin, the most trifling object or the most important, is in its place. This huge battlement might be the toy of a race a thousand times larger than man. Silence reigns. The men are forward, quite a long way off, it seems. Most of them are out of sight, lying down upon the deck,



WEYMOUTH.

or sheltering beneath the forecastle, or screened behind tarpaulins or hatchway covers. The skies happen to be blue and serene; the rolling ocean is blue also, and calm as a lake. We ride majestically on her bosom; are soothed as a child sleeping on its mother's breast; possess the same unconscious sense of security and innocence of mind.

The officers cluster in the stern of the ship; lean against a gun or over the sides, gazing dreamily into space; contemplate the majesty of the surrounding scene, and administer little reflections to each other that are very edifying, bringing up the tone of one's mind to a higher level than is easily attainable on shore. When we come to think of it, it is no wonder that our naval men are full of lofty aspirations and impossible ideals, putting ordinary landsmen to the blush.

Or perhaps they may be in the ward-room. One (Van Stoker) far gone in love—for naval men are mortal, after all—will be inditing sonnets to a lady's eyebrows, destined for the post at the next port

we touch at. Another (Captain Pyramid) will be reading up a page of Sanskrit. A third (the amiable M.B., our junior surgeon) is studying Theology for a Debating Society. A fourth (Pat Darcy: the only leaven of Irish blood in the ward-room wherewith to infuse a slight tone of dash and romance and wildness into the more sober Saxon temperament) is great in art treasures, and pores over the most wonderful collection of photographs and black paper silhouettes in the United Kingdom. He spends half his time in gazing dreamily at their beauties and re-arranging their order; occasionally holding one up to our united and enthusiastic admiration. Two frivolous minds at the other end of the table are somewhat distracting the attention of our more sober intellects by rattling the dice at a game

THE WHITE HORSE.

of backgammon. Perhaps it is as well that there *are* one or two frivolous beings on board. It keeps up the balance of things, the contrast of light and shade; prevents our becoming altogether a group of students too much devoted to the midnight oil and the study of philosophy and metaphysics, the interesting topic of molecules.

Finally, this cruise is especially delightful because of the companionship. There is no pleasanter, more gentlemanly, more genial set of men on the face of the globe than our naval officers. Devoid of all affectation and conceit, there is a freedom and frankness about them, a straightforward genuineness, an apparent forgetfulness of self, which makes them the best of friends, the pleasantest of guests, the most hospitable of hosts. Entering the Service at an age scarcely beyond childhood (a point that certainly needs re-consideration) they are launched upon a long course of severe discipline—and, where the First Lieutenant happens to be a martinet, of suffering. All nonsense is knocked out of them, and arriving at man's estate, they reap the benefit of the school that has fitted them for their profession.

Our military men have not the same advantages—or disadvantages—and cannot expect similar results. They have to wait for time and the slower discipline of life. But they, too, become the pleasantest of friends and companions when the first grey hairs begin to show themselves, and—say thirty-five—has struck upon the gong of time.

So, receiving and accepting an invitation to join the First Reserve on her cruise, I felt that pleasure and profit were in store when the actual day arrived, and the train from London steamed into the old, perhaps quaint, but certainly not very lively town of Weymouth.

Crossing the Parade in front of the sea, I came full tilt upon my old friend Charlie Broadley. For a moment I thought I saw a ghost—only that the apparition was scarcely shadowy enough, and was by no means transparent. Broadley is very real; there is nothing of the dyspeptic or consumptive about him to raise sentimental emotions. Had he gone into the Church, for instance, he could never have degenerated into a ladies' pet curate, but would have turned out a hard-working, thorough-going, earnest and muscular Christian. No parting the hair down the middle, or perfumed handkerchiefs; no incense or vestments; and no Æsthetic rooms for receiving the fair sex to five o'clock tea as a prelude to Vespers.

I thought it a ghost because he had written: "I shall *not* meet you at Weymouth. Come on to Portland, and at 5.30 you will find one of our boats waiting for you at the pier-head. Bring a supply of serious literature with you. We are nearly all of a hard-working, studious turn on board, given to discuss science and all the ologies, politics, the Land League and the Salvation Army; but we relax our minds at night with a little whist."

For Broadley to say a thing is to do it, and therefore I doubted for a moment what stood before me. But his *un*shadowy form and his hearty laugh—Broadley's laugh runs on for ever, like a brook, and is just as refreshing—assured me that no ghost was here. He, on his part, likewise thought he saw a spirit—and, in point of shadow and substance, with more excuse for his error. For, marvellous to relate, the train had come in before its time, and Broadley, then on his way to the station, looked to wait for it. As it was, we were just in time for the next train onward; so instead of turning in to the Club, and wasting our precious moments in the frivolous politics of the day, we said good-bye to Weymouth and went round to Portland.

A short journey, but one that must often have been taken with a heavy heart: the end of many a man's liberty, his last look, as it were, upon the world. There was the prison-crowned hill, overlooking the sea and the breakwater. The grey walls, like battlements and fortifications, stood out in contrast with the green slopes, steep, rugged, barren. Flocks of sheep without the walls, cropping the short grass, wandered at will—whilst the unhappy human goats within, laboured and sighed, and now and then rebelled, and, as far as liberty went, found no place for repentance. The hill reared

its head, a standing monument to the sad side of life. If you wander near the walls, the silence of death ever seems to reign there. Within is a busy hive, but no hum of bees. To-day the hill looked bright and cheerful in the afternoon sunshine, bringing more vividly before the imagination the contrast of the little unseen world it held. Now and then a prisoner tries to escape; now and then one *has* escaped, though rarely; and when the alarm is given, the peace of the island is disturbed by the gun that booms forth its warning. What a death knell it must sound to the poor hunted wretch, who, perhaps has plunged into the sea, and thrown himself on the tender mercies of the waves, as his last chance for life and liberty.

Portland is altogether an interesting little place. The town, on the other side the hill, slopes down to the sea, and the coast sweeps round in a long, far-reaching curve. The quarries are numerous, and the stone they send forth to the world has been destined alike for palace and for prison. Across the water, jutting out on a point of land, are the grey, crumbling ruins of Sandsfoot Castle; and yet further off is a White Horse Valley, the huge representation of the animal and its rider, on the slope of the hill, just discernible from the island.

Out on the broad waters, the Squadron was at anchor: the Flagship —the Hercules—nearest in shore. Eight men-of-war waiting the hour for departure. Within the calm shelter of the breakwater, the Fleet looked noble and stately. The more impressive, perhaps, that already in the Far East one heard the rumble of distant thunder. The bugle-call to action was striking its first clear note, stirring up the hearts and homes of England.

At the end of the short pier, the steam pinnace was waiting, and in a few minutes we stood on board the splendid deck of the *Defence* And here it may be well to state for the enlightenment of the uninitiated reader, that a man-of-war has three decks: the upper, the main, and the lower. To the unlearned in these matters, there is often a confusion of ideas between the upper deck and the main deck: so that they are, as it were, constantly changing places, and performing a sort of miracle that, on board, would often cause an agreeable diversion.

The upper deck is open to the sky, the full fresh air; you breathe freely. The main deck will supply you with sufficient air for one lung at a time, so that the lungs breathe alternately; one in and one out, like the action of a harmonium: you are in comparative luxury. The lower deck—which in the *Defence*, owing to her watertight compartments, is so cut up into sections, or what some old sea-dog originally designated "flats"—refuses to supply any air at all, and you become at once amphibious. Whenever the ward-room reaches a temperature of 212°, or boiling water point, a windsail is immediately put down, communicating with the upper deck. It is a huge, very huge funnel made of canvas; the upper portion spread out like wings, and attached to the rigging. At night it looks like a great bird of

prey, seeking someone to devour. These wings catch all the air they can, and send it down this impromptu shaft. If anyone, less amphibious than another, is very much overcome by the 212°, he lies flat on the floor underneath the shaft, and receives the full benefit of the air bath. Should this fail to revive him, he is then carried on deck—the upper deck—and placed in an easy chair; the doctor pays constant attention to his pulse, cooling draughts are administered, and restoration gradually takes place.

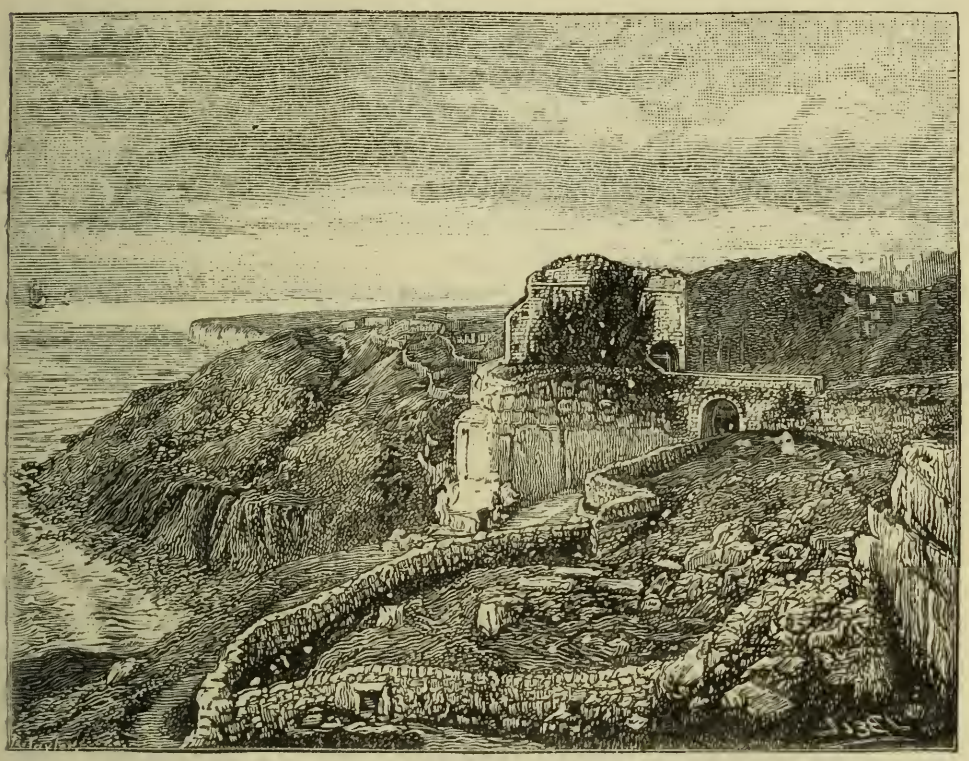
But some ward-rooms are better than others; and the more newly-constructed vessels are built with some regard to the unnecessary

SANDSFOOT CASTLE.

sacrifice of human life. The *Defence*, was about the oldest vessel in the First Reserve. She had the finest upper deck, but, in revenge, perhaps the worst ward-room. And when the scuttles of the cabins leading from the ward-room had to be closed on account of danger from without, the atmosphere would sometimes bring on congestion of brain and body: cases of suspended animation: interesting as types to the doctor, perhaps, but distressing to the patient. Almost every night, someone in an adventurous state of mind, would turn in with an open scuttle, and wake presently to find that a sea had washed in, and that he was lying in a salt water bath. Not a pleasant surprise.

Perhaps someone asks for an explanation of the word Ward-room. A man-of-war has its quarters and departments just like any other

great institution. There are, to begin with, the Captain's quarters, in the stern of the vessel, and communicating with the main deck. Here, night and day stands a sentry, keeping guard, as it were, over the monarch of the ship. For every captain on board a man-of-war is a King. The captain's quarters are comparatively large and airy, and consist of several—*rooms*, as a landsman would call them. On the other hand, being over the screw, they come in for all the plunging and vibration of that most useful and ingenious, but most unpleasant invention. Again, being immediately under the upper deck—which, as it were, forms the ceiling of the Captain's quarters,



Bow and Arrow Castle.

every sound above is heard, ten times magnified. So that occasionally you may fancy yourself in a Dante's Inferno, tormented both above and below, no rest anywhere.

All sounds had a way of amplifying themselves in the Captain's cabin. One night Wakeham, the gunnery lieutenant, went off in the steam pinnace to discharge a torpedo. He declared that he was two miles away, and yet the horrible thing shook everything upon the Captain's table and sideboard, and sent us all three jumping out of our chairs like rockets. No warning had been given to us, and you might have fancied that the torpedo had exploded within ten yards of the stern.

When my old friend Broadley left the *Defence* on his promotion (the news reached him at the Alhambra, of all lovely places in the

world for good tidings) and at the invitation of Captain Trelawny Jago I became his guest and took up my quarters with him, I was awakened regularly every morning about 4.30 by the scrubbing of decks. The men would come to the locker overhead, take out their infernal machines—*i.e.*, brushes, squeegees and swabs—ram the handles into the brushes with a vengeance that made one think the very deck itself would come through, and commence operations. The agonies that ensued banished all possibility of sleep. Often I would wake and find myself unconsciously quoting Hood's lines, merely changing the gender for the sake of applicability :

> " But his sleep was restless and broken still,
> For, turning often and oft
> From side to side, he mutter'd and moan'd,
> And tossed his arms aloft."

Until at seven o'clock the Captain's steward or his valet, like a ministering angel (in all but appearance) would arrive with biscuits and a cup of coffee to restore exhausted nature, and depart with blessings in their stead.

It was only towards the very last that, in the course of conversation, I happened in a weak moment to mention the torments I had gone through with the heroism of a martyr, in consequence of this early scrubbing.

" And you mean to say," said Captain Jago, " that you never rang the bell for the sentry, and had it stopped and the men sent to Jericho —rather than be disturbed ?"

I should as soon have thought of taking command of the Fleet. There is a punctuality, a severity, an observance, a regularity on board a man-of-war that inspires awe in a civilian in the carrying out of the smallest rule and detail, and makes him tremble in his shoes when an unfortunate delinquent is brought up for punishment. For creating a true manliness of bearing, a firmness and decision of character, there can be no better school than the Navy. Had I issued a very mild protest for a little less noise overhead, I should almost have expected to be tried by court-martial.

" If I had only known this beforehand," said Captain Jago, in the kindness of his heart and the fulness of his hospitality, " I would have had the scrubbing put off to a later hour." It was almost the last day of our more than pleasant cruise—and I was glad I had not spoken sooner.

The Captain's quarters, then, are on the main deck. For the ward-room of the *Defence* we descended a stage, to the lower deck. The ward-room is the mess-room of the officers, including not only the lieutenants and the officers of the marines (we know how the marines distinguished themselves in the late war, proved themselves the very backbone of the army, and were always in the hottest of the fight, " Per mare per terram"—they were equally brave on shore or afloat) but also the Chaplain, the Doctors, the Paymaster, and, of late, the Chief Engineer.

Here we messed. Here we would sit, sometimes in a temperature of 212°. Here we would discuss science, and read aloud learned treatises for the benefit of each other. Here Pyramid would study Sanskrit, and the ever-amiable M.B. would discourse learnedly on the origin of species; and Van Stoker would sit and sigh and moon by the hour together, and indite sonnets to his lady-love: whole reams of poetry—as I was afterwards to find to my cost. Here the rattle of dice in frivolous hands at frivolous backgammon would be heard from early morn to dewy eve, and here at night we would relax the severe discipline of study with a serious rubber.

Punctually at eleven, enter Diogenes with his lantern—a marine whose duty it was to announce the hour—as fatal to us as midnight to Cinderella. A sort of animated Curfew. A tall, grave figure enveloped in a long cloak, and looking like a walking ghost. A lantern in one hand hanging by his side, the other giving a military salute, as if his life depended on it, and the muffled voice announcing the end of another day. So exact were we; so particular, conscientious and punctilious were the officers, that even if the announcement came in the very middle of a rubber, down would go cards, up we would rise, score our points, out like a flash went the lights, and in solemn procession each would depart to his cabin. If the M.B. gave a "small and early" in his own den, the same rigid punctuality was observed.

What a beautiful lesson this naval observance of rules and regulations sets us landsmen! How we may hide our diminished heads! We who, not being bound by any particular form or set of codes; being, as it were, our own masters, accountable only to ourselves, are therefore almost more bound by honour to walk in the strict path of duty. And how thoughtful of the Lords of the Admiralty to have instituted this rule, who know how essential it is to health and beauty that man should retire to rest at reasonable hours.

The M.B. was the only one on board who ever gave a "small and early," just alluded to. His servant would take round the invitations, worded as follows. We will quote the first one that comes to hand as an example. It related to the *last* "small and early" of the cruise, and was addressed to Pyramid:

"The M.B. requests the honour of Captain Pyramid's company, at a small and early to-night, Thursday, the 20th July, for purposes of Discussion and Improvement. Subject:—The evil effects of smoking as illustrated by the immoderate use of tobacco on board the other vessels of the Royal Reserve Squadron, against the extreme moderation of the officers of the *Defence*. N.B.—Fans and smelling bottles not provided. 9 to 11.30. Naval time."

But there is not space in this paper to go into the full particulars of these highly interesting and instructive little réunions. That may come by-and-bye.

And now to go back to Portland—not deprived of our liberty, beloved reader, but on the contrary prepared for flight. Standing, indeed, on the long, splendid deck of the *Defence*, I felt that for

some weeks to come I had said good-bye to England, and, virtually, to shore-life. The anticipation of the approaching cruise, of broad seas, and glorious air, and blue skies, and pleasant companionship, was keenest enjoyment. Pleasures are greater, it is said, in anticipation than in realisation. This instance was certainly an exception to the rule. But all men look at things from their own point of view. Life to one is death to another. One revels in the east wind, another would simply like to take to his bed when that kindly-cruel, cruelly-kind scourge is abroad on his rambles. No doubt many in the Fleet would be glad enough when at the appointed day and hour we once more dropped anchor within the Portland breakwater. The

Convicts at Work.

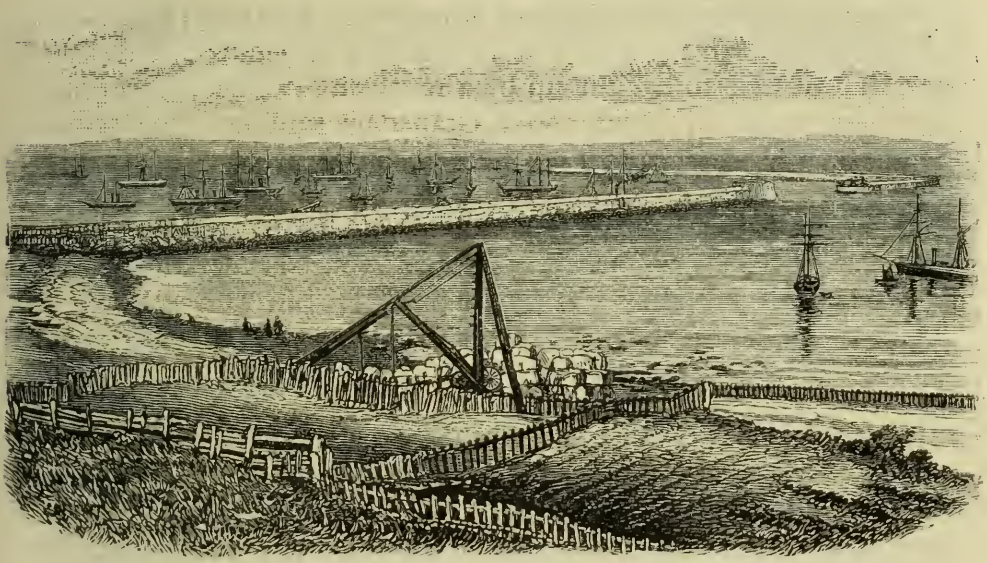
gobbies* for instance, to a man, one might be pretty well assured, were counting the hours when the ever-rolling stream of Time should restore them to the snug shelter of those little white homes that, at intervals encircle our island like a safety-belt. They looked upon the cruise not as matter of pleasure, but rather as a sentence of Six Weeks' Imprisonment with Hard Labour.

For the Reserve Squadron was not going into the excitement of action. We were not to proceed further than Gibraltar; not to see more of the blue waters of the Mediterranean than washed the base of the great rock; unless, mounting to the summit of that rock, we took a long, magnificent view of the tideless sea; where, on one side, across the Straits, stretched the faint outline of the shores of Morocco, and in fancy one saw uprising the mosque towers and minarets, the flat roofs and white walls of the ancient of Tangiers, the habits and customs of a thousand years ago still prevalent there to-day; where at night you stumble over the Moors lying in the streets, curled up in their sacks, like dogs, sleeping as comfortably as the luxury-loving European on

* Coastguardsmen.

his bed of down. "But in point of fact," I said recently to a friend, with the gravity of a sexton, "it is easy enough to avoid them, for at Tangiers it is full moon all the year round." "Indeed," cried he, in faith and amazement, "how do they manage that? And why can't we have it so in England?" And then doubt began to dawn upon him.

With the exception of Mr. Edward Jago, the brother of Captain Trelawny Jago, I was the only civilian, the only guest on board the *Defence*. Thus he and I were, in this respect, fellow sympathisers; could keep each other in countenance; make mutual notes and comparisons of all we should do, all we should reform, the weak points we should strengthen, the unnecessary discipline we should relax,



PORTLAND BREAKWATER.

the rapidity with which we should promote, the thousand-and-one comforts and luxuries we should organise for the happiness of the members of the British Navy—if only we were at the head of the Department. Perhaps, too, it was this "fellow feeling" that in all our subsequent days and occasional excursions, caused Mr. Jago to add so much to my pleasure, and to the liveliness of the whole cruise.

The following was to be our programme; and for all we then knew to the contrary, we should steadily keep to it.

Sailing from Portland, we should gradually lose sight of the coast of England, and presently entering the Bay of Biscay, make for Arosa Bay. Here we were to remain several days, and then proceed to Gibraltar. After a stay of eight or nine days at Gibraltar we were to return homewards and put into Cadiz. This would give some of us an opportunity of visiting Seville, famous for its orange groves and its beautiful women. From Cadiz we were to go on to Vigo; and thence steam leisurely back to Portland, reaching the latter on the 24th July; the whole cruise occupying rather more than five weeks.

The programme was a sufficiently interesting one. Moreover, it would allow those whose inclinations prompted them, or whose duties enabled them to obtain leave, to take excursions into the country, and so vary the monotony, the daily round and common task of board-ship life, by exploring the wonders and vast resources of Spain; and even vary the excitement of travel by an encounter with brigands, or the rescue of some fair Señorita from the cruel clutch and close confinement of convent walls. For even the greatest book-worms and most serious of men have been moved to deeds of heroism by the sight of youth and beauty in distress.

The encounter with brigands might be looked upon as a certainty. Indeed, later on, when starting on an excursion to the Alhambra (we shall come to that wonder of wonders in due time) so solicitous was Pyramid for my safety, that he insisted on lending me a sword-stick, and offered to back it up by a revolver. "You are certain to encounter brigands round about Granada," said he, "or prowling about the walls and groves of the Alhambra. If they don't attack you (though they are pretty sure to do that, and I advise everyone to make his will before starting), you may reckon that a few loose stones will come crashing down upon your head, and produce concussion of the brain."

This opinion was echoed by several others, who all spoke from a positive knowledge of facts. Had they themselves been to the Alhambra? Well, no; but they knew those who had—and had never returned to tell the tale. Then who *had* told the tale? Tradition—and a post-mortem.—This was startling and restraining, until it suddenly occurred to us that not one of these prophets of evil intended visiting the Alhambra. Intentions were good, but duty happened to interpose at the right—or wrong—moment. Remembering this, anyone with the slightest knowledge of human nature could put two and two together and draw his own conclusions. However, whilst the revolver was declined, the sword-stick was gratefully accepted. Whether or not it was used as a weapon of defence will appear in the sequel.

We were to sail on Thursday, the 15th June: but on that day the sun rose and set, and we made no sign. Certainly it was glorious weather, but that fickle element for once seemed settled, and one glorious day, after all, is very much like another. The sun rose on Friday, the 16th, in full splendour. The Duke was on board the Flag-ship, and also the Duke of Connaught, who, for the sake of the sea voyage, would accompany the Reserve Squadron as far as Gibraltar, and thence return overland to England.

At 9.30, on Friday, the 16th June, we started. We were to have put into Falmouth, but being a day late, we made straight for sea instead. This was disappointing; especially so to me. For I had hoped to get a glimpse of its good old Rector, who, in the days gone by, had been my beloved pastor and master: a man, who, for intellect and lore, and marvellous powers of conversation, stood almost un-

rivalled. I knew well how he would be watching the bay from his pleasant windows for our appearance, and would watch in vain.

Not many places in England equal Falmouth in the beauty of approach. Turner seems to have been one of the few to recognise this truth. The hills, repeating themselves over and over again in wave-like undulations; the crescent sweep of the bay, its green, transparent waters meeting the white sand of the shore in a long-drawn, ever moving line; the mouth of the harbour guarded so grandly by the walls of old Pendennis; the distant view of the Fal beyond, its banks one rich unbroken carpet of waving trees: all these points contribute to form an exquisite and unrivalled picture. We hear little of it, whilst much is said of the approach to Plymouth, Dartmouth, and many other spots on our fair west coast. These indeed have their beauty, and may be content; but the approach to Falmouth on a sunny day, is before them all. It possesses a grand, noble and open outline and effect altogether its own.

The *Lively*, the Duke's yacht, accompanied us on first starting, with the Duchess of Edinburgh on board, who could be distinguished sitting upon the bridge and watching the movements of the Fleet.

These movements were worth watching. The vessels in themselves were a grand sight. Nothing could be more stately than their manner of getting slowly under weigh, as one after another passed beyond the breakwater into the open Channel, and gradually took up its appointed station. Everything was in our favour. The freshness of the early morning was exhilarating. The sun, already far up in the sky, poured his rays upon the water, that danced and sparkled and flashed a thousand gleams around, as if to bid us a lively farewell and speed us on our voyage.

Then, in a double line of four vessels, two abreast, we proceeded to face these kindly elements.

This was our order:

The HERCULES.
H.R.H. The DUKE OF EDINBURGH *in Command of the Squadron.*
(Captain HENEAGE.)

The LORD WARDEN.
(Captain CATOR.)

The WARRIOR.
(Captain TOWNSEND.)

The HECTOR.
(Captain CARTER.)

The DEFENCE.
(Captain JAGO.)

The PENELOPE.
(Captain D'ARCY-IRVINE.)

The REPULSE.
(Captain SULIVAN.)

The VALIANT.
(Captain POLAND.)

As soon as we were in position, the signal came from the Flagship to perform evolutions or tactics. A prettier and more graceful sight could not well be imagined. As the eight vessels gradually changed positions (a sort of chassé croisé) each vessel was supposed to do its work with mathematical precision. Starting from the position of the order of sailing—two lines of four, two abreast—perhaps they gradually resolved themselves into two lines of two, four abreast. Next form

into lines diagonal; next separate, then close in: in fact, endeavour to square the circle, and so fulfil the plan signalised at the commencement from the Flagship. This lasted for some time, and when all was over, we fell back into our original positions.

From the *Lively* the effect must have been still more interesting than from any of the vessels, as the evolutions would be more distinctly marked, the graceful movements more apparent. The morning wore on, and after accompanying us for some hours, the yacht signalled for permission to part company. This being immediately granted, the following message was semaphored to the Flagship:

"The Duchess wishes the Reserve Squadron a pleasant cruise."

And from the Flagship came the answer from the Duke:

"Many thanks. Good-bye."

Upon which the *Lively* steamed away at full speed for Plymouth, where a train would be in waiting for the Duchess. The *Lively* would then proceed to Falmouth for all letters addressed to the Fleet; which would not, in consequence of our changed movements, reach the hands of their several owners until the *Lively* joined us at Arosa Bay. Van Stoker, being in love, was especially distraught, went about like a shadow, and lost his colour.

With the departure of the *Lively* we felt that our last link with England had fallen away, the annual cruise of the First Reserve Squadron for 1882 had fairly commenced. A grander day had never dawned. Everything seemed to promise well for our pleasure and success. All that day we steamed down Channel, at a leisurely and stately speed. The English coast was in sight; one well-known spot after another opened up and was left behind. The red cliffs of Devonshire looked warm and glowing in the sunshine. The rocky coast never seemed more picturesque and inviting. With the perversity of human nature, we loved them more than ever now that we were about to lose them for a time. But every absence is a farewell, and every farewell is the conclusion of a chapter in the Book of our transitory Life; a reminder of the Finis that closes the Volume. So in every farewell there lurks an undertone in a full minor key which leaves us sad and solitary, and, to some extent, takes from the mind its just estimate of things that are passing.

But I don't know that to-day anyone was in a specially melancholy mood. There was too much brightness and sunshine over all. The anticipation of what was to come blotted out the regret for what we were now rapidly losing. Plymouth and Dartmouth were left behind. Out there, on the blue waters, stood the old and the new Eddystone lighthouses, looking like sire and son; for the new beacon has been made larger and stronger than its predecessor. Our last impression of England was a combination of red sandstone cliffs and blue skies, and calm waters with long, stately rolls, that swept onwards and broke at last upon the shore.

NUMBER TWENTY-FIVE.

"LOSTHAVEN.—The Imperial Hotel. Unequalled as a winter resort. Tariff moderate."—I dropped the paper and meditated on the advertisement. Across my fancy there came a sudden whiff of the salt sea-breeze, a vision of the wide grey tossing expanse of waters, a sound in my ears of the soft crashing pebbles on the wet brown beach. I had been smothered, poisoned by weeks of London fog. My eyes were tingling, my lungs choked, my ideas muddled. The more I tried to paint the stronger grew the conviction that, unless I let my pictures resolutely alone, I should have nothing fit to send in to the Spring exhibitions. I felt bothered, miserable, grimy to the bone.

"I'll try a week of Losthaven," I suddenly decided. "Second-class tariff, railway fare included, won't ruin me. I'll make studies of wintry seas and skies if I can find nothing else. I'll start to-day!" In ten minutes I had reduced the room to chaos, rummaging out sketch-blocks, brushes, waterproof garments, and a spare suit. In half an hour I had packed and was slowly and painfully wending my way station-wards; cabby walking invisibly at the horse's head.

We crept out of London by degrees with much whistling and signalling. Black fog enveloped us till we crossed the river, then rows of buildings loomed more and more distinct of outline and paler of tint as they became more scattered, till the brown fields and bare hedges had the land to themselves. Then came the sun, red and wintry, hailed as the face of a friend long missed and mourned. A soft blue haze hung about the leafless coppices. A robin was singing like mad on a bush of green laurel in a station-master's garden. I didn't wonder at him. *I* could have shouted too. It was all so fresh, so life-giving, so *clean*. Colour, light, pure air, and—as evening drew on and dusk was falling—the Sea!

I could see it, grey and tossing in the distance, as I stood on the platform. It boomed in my ears as I, sole passenger in the new Hotel omnibus, was rattled down a bran new road and discharged under the imposing new portico of "The Imperial."

I had expected to be "skied" in virtue of my second-class ticket, and was agreeably surprised at my accommodation. It was a little out-lying nook at the end of a corridor, into which opened some of the best suites of private rooms.

I found myself the solitary occupant of the coffee-room on descending to dinner, though one table was elaborately laid for a large party, and another, close to mine, for two people. Three or four gentlemen dropped in after me, and I presently became aware by a subdued sound of voices and the frou-frou of skirts, that the occu-

pants of the table behind me were taking their places. I could see one of them distinctly in a long mirror in front of me. A lady who insisted on being young and beautiful, and *was* undeniably well-dressed. She wore a queer mixture of coral pink cashmere and grey brocade, with clasps and ornaments of oxydised silver and coral. Nothing else about her worth looking at, I decided. "A blonde—paper-white instead of milk-white—green shadows instead of warm ones—eyelashes too light—waist too tight—elbows too sharp—nearer thirty than twenty—the gown suggests—'Trousseau.'" What is *he* like, I wonder?

I could only catch at intervals a glimpse of a long white nose above a heavy black moustache, turned deferentially to the little woman whenever she spoke—and she spoke a good deal, with much vivacious raising of the eyebrows and arch glancing of her china blue eyes. I could also see his right hand now and then as he lifted or put down a glass, and I didn't like it. I believe in the expression of a man's hand, though it is given to few to read it accurately. When the door opened to admit a party of ladies and gentlemen, Madame's animation increased. She shook out her draperies, unfurled her big pink feather fan and posed effectively. Her companion didn't seem to sympathize. I heard his chair give an impatient scroop; he disposed of his last glass of wine hastily, picked up her bouquet of azaleas, and made way for her to pass out; which she did lingeringly, watched with much interest by the party at the large table. My bride and groom appeared in the visitors' book as "The Hon. Claude and Mrs. Loseby."

"Loseby? Ah, a son of Lord Rotherwode's—a bad lot I fancy," was my mental comment, as wearily yawning, I ascended to my room, candlestick in hand. I passed the object of my reflections in converse with one of the chambermaids on the landing—an unattractive female with a grim white face and heavy black fringe—and, further on, as I passed the door of one of the private sitting-rooms, heard what I determined to be Mrs. Claude Loseby's voice singing a fashionable ballad with intense expression, to a slovenly accompaniment.

Up early next morning and out to a fresh, newly-washed, spray-besprinkled world. There had been a storm in the night, and the brown shingle was flecked with quivering patches of foam and dark wreaths of tangle. The hotel stood at the commencement of a sea-wall and parade, extending at that time some two hundred yards westwards. The sea had scattered pebbles and sand over the asphalte, and tossed about the huge blocks of stone at the unfinished end, as if they had been brickbats. I hurried back for breakfast and my sketching things, and returned just as the sun, breaking from a bank of softly piled grey clouds, set the whole glorious field of the sea sparkling and glancing right away over to France.

I had worked for an hour or so, before the tall hulking figure

of Mr. Claude Loseby passed between me and the sunshine. He walked to the edge of the wall and looked down, as if measuring the depth to which the shingle had been excavated by the waves —some fifteen feet in places—laying bare the masses of stone at the foundation. I objected to him—to his slouch, his shoulders, his coat, his big cigar, everything—more strongly by daylight than gaslight, if possible. However, when he sauntered up and civilly enough asked leave to look at my sketch, I responded amicably.

"Oh, Claude, how *exquisite!* how truly *sweet!*" interposed a sharp voice, and I beheld Madame in an elaborate serge costume of browns and scarlet at my elbow. Claude cut her raptures uncommonly short, and walked her off towards the older and more frequented part of the parade.

I saw no more of them until after luncheon, when, warned by a well-known sensation of stiffness and numbness that open air work was of doubtful prudence in February, I established myself in the sunny drawing-room window with my easel and paints, and a breakwater, some weed-hung piles, a rusty chain and a stranded boat for company. An empty carriage came round to the door, and I heard Mrs. Loseby's voice in the hall. "Forgotten your cigar-case? I'll wait for you in here," and she entered: a beautiful vision in golden tinted velvet, satin and fur; a marvellous costume that almost warmed up her tepid prettiness into beauty.

She saw my approving glance and kindly gave me a better opportunity of admiring her magnificence, placing herself directly in front of me in full sunlight and a well arranged attitude. I did not feel that she would resent the proceeding for a moment, when I took up a fresh block, dipped a brush in raw sienna, and set to work. Loseby was an unconscionable time finding his cigar-case, and I got a very fair sketch of the lady, face and all. She looked sweetly unconscious during the performance, but threw me an arch glance as she passed out. "Ah, I guessed what you were doing. How very wicked of you; but one forgives everything to genius," she simpered coquettishly.

"Who in the world could she have been?" I wondered, as I put some additional touches to her portrait from memory, and, leaving it to dry, resumed my breakwater. An answer came to my question, through the window, in the course of the next few minutes. Two old gentlemen who had been pottering about the Parade had settled themselves and their cigars on a bench beneath me. "Yes, she's had the handling of a tidy lot of money from first to last; and now she's got a husband who'll help her to make it fly, if I am not much mistaken. I knew her father once—Weatherhead, of Weatherhead and Watkins, drysalters; and I knew her first husband, Tom Perryman. A very decent fellow, Tom; and worth—aye, I might say, a quarter of a million, and be under the figure, when he died; and all left to that chit of a Letty Weatherhead. The will was made before the boy

was born. It's a scandal, sir, that the law doesn't interfere when a man makes such a fool of himself."

Old gentleman Number Two didn't seem interested, and the subject dropped.

The afternoon express brought down an omnibus load of "Saturday to Monday" visitors to the Imperial. The Losebys did not appear at dinner, rather to my disappointment. I was beginning to feel curiously interested in them, and to spend odd moments in wondering how the marriage had come about; what had become of the little son, and divers other unprofitable speculations. There was a constant bustle of fresh arrivals by every train that evening, and the drawing-room was well filled. A "professional" on a holiday had taken possession of the piano, and was giving "reminiscences and imitations" of divers musical stars rather cleverly when I entered, and prominent amongst his audience were Mr. and Mrs. Loseby. She was resplendent as usual, and his attentions as lover-like. How much of genuine was there in them I wondered, as I placed myself in the shadow of a window-curtain unobserved by either, though I was near enough to catch snatches of their conversation in the pauses of the music.

"Not very select here? I dare say not; but I am *not* going to my room just yet. It's not worth dressing just to come down and be hurried up again. I find it too dull to put up with for long."

"We will stay here as long as you please, dearest," he murmured, with a black scowl.

I lost the rest of his sentence.

"Well, there's the ladies' drawing-room—You can't object to that. You may bring me my work there," was her reply.

She handed him her fan, her mousquetaire gloves, her bunch of big white violets. He dropped a filmy white wrap carefully round her shoulders, and they passed from amongst us.

I had the curiosity to look into the ladies' drawing-room an hour or two later. It was about as lively as a station waiting-room. Mrs. Loseby sat listless and cross, in a big chair, her hands folded idly on the crewel work in her lap. She looked so chagrined and at odds with life in general, that I was touched, and unwitting of etiquette, entered, and made my way to her.

"I want to show you something, and ask if you are very much offended with me," I said, producing my little sketch of her.

"Oh, you clever, dreadful creature! I shall never forgive you, never! What a sweet thing you have made of it!" was the lady's response. "But it's too utterly flattering; you have made me look young—actually young and happy."

"And why not?" was the fitting rejoinder. She gave me one of her glances. "Why, I'm ever so old," she tittered, "and happy? ah, no one knows what I have gone through! Riches and rank aren't everything, Mr. Sherratt; and Losthaven isn't exactly the place to get one's spirits up in, either."

"You find it dull?" I inquired.

"Well, I suppose, considering the circumstances" (this with a simper)—"that's a shocking thing to say, but I do. I couldn't imagine why Claude brought me to such a dull hole, after Paris, but he heard that his father and sister, that's Lord Rotherwode and the Honourable Cecilia Saxon, were to be at Boatstown this month. They were all against his marriage, you know, but he says when they see *me*"—she paused in modest confusion, while I made the appropriate rejoinder, and continued: "They were very rude about my poor dear first husband having made his money in trade. As if it mattered! and my papa can never forgive dear Claude having been a little wild and extravagant, like all the aristocracy. Ah, I've a deal to put up with, Mr. Sherratt."

I was wondering how far her confidences would carry her, when I saw the unpleasant-faced chambermaid pass the door and take a rapid survey of us all in a second's glance.

"There, that's another of my troubles. My maid left for some ridiculous reason, and didn't Claude go and arrange for *that* woman to attend on me while I'm here! A hateful creature, always prowling about and spying after me." She looked at my sketch uneasily.

"I was going to ask your leave to keep it," I said, evidently much to her relief. "I shan't show it to anyone till it's finished."

"How I wish Dooly could have seen it," she said suddenly, in quite a different tone to her usual affected one. "He *would* be pleased. 'Pity mamma' he always calls me. I mean Julius, my little son. He is just three years old and such a dear, wee fellow. He lives with my papa, but is to come to us, of course, when we are in our own house. I'm his sole guardian. Poor dear Perryman trusted me absolutely, and I say papa has no right to talk of making him a ward in Chancery."

I was struck by the change for the better in her manner when her child was mentioned. There was a ring of genuine motherly feeling in her sharp voice, and almost an expression of interest in her doll's face. I don't know what instinct made me cut the interview as short as I civilly could. As I made my way down the corridor to my room I caught a glimpse of a hard, white face and a pair of bold black eyes scanning me from the gloom of an open doorway—No. 25. I returned the stare with interest, and the woman vanished.

Next morning, Sunday, there was an imposing muster of the faithful, in tall hats and long coats or gorgeous church-going bonnets, as the case might be, in the hall of the Imperial. I, conscious of a rough suit and soft felt hat, waited till the worshippers and their prayer-books should have cleared off, before starting on a reckless Sabbath-breaking tramp through the woods. Down the staircase rustled Mrs. Loseby with much gleam of satin and clatter of bangles. She stopped half way and looked about, eagerly, I fancied, till she spied me. She beckoned me and spoke over the banisters.

"You are not going to church? Will you post this for me?" In a lower tone: "I dare not trust it to anyone about me."

I raised my hand to receive the letter, when a longer arm than mine was stretched up from somewhere behind me and her husband's white fingers closed on it.

"My *dearest*, why trouble Mr. Sherratt? *I* must go to the post-office after church."

I turned sharply and caught his eyes fixed on me with a wicked look that melted, as I gazed, into one of polite deprecation. The bells began to ring and they passed on, he carrying her dainty little church service with ostentatious care. "A most devoted husband—or Gaoler—which?" I asked myself.

Off to the woods—masses of bluish purple leafless stems and twigs—just then tipped with a warm golden brown in the distance, where the leaf buds were swelling under the bark. A walk over the hills to the rectory of an old school-fellow, afternoon service in a primitive little chapel with a congregation of nine, and back again through the deepening twilight that just lasted till the distant bells of Losthaven struck on my ear. It was quite night before I reached the hotel. I could just make out clusters of shadowy forms on the Parade, against the sea. There was to be a high tide that night—always an exciting event in Losthaven. As I entered the hall, Loseby came running downstairs, a lady's fur cloak thrown over his shoulder.

"Ah! good evening," he said, in a most friendly manner. "Only just home? You've had a glorious day. Done any sketching? You should come out and look at the tide. I never saw the Channel look so full. Lucky for Losthaven the wind is north, what there is of it Have a cigar?" I thanked him and declined. He stopped to light his at a gas jet. "My wife is out there. She wouldn't come in, so I have been finding a wrap for her." He seemed to take for granted that I was coming with him, so I did, for no other reason.

We strolled up the Parade, till we came to a barrier of tubs and planks, where the asphalte was still soft. "This way," he said, striding over it. "I left her sitting here—Why—where can she be? We must have passed her. Perhaps she got cold sitting so long."

Certainly no one was in sight on that end of the sea-wall, and we turned back, scanning each dark group carefully, as we passed them. I was footsore, and when we regained the hotel, left Loseby to continue his chase and made for my room. I dawdled over dressing, and it was nearly half an hour later when I heard shouts on the Parade, and what seemed a sudden rush of footsteps with excited voices intermixed. It was too dark to see anything from my window. "Ah! the water has got over at last," was my reflection, till the footsteps and voices seemed to draw nearer and nearer. I opened my door. There was some commotion in the hall and on the staircase, and while I looked a little crowd appeared at the end of our corridor, moving slowly and carefully. I saw the

manager of the hotel, and one of the leading doctors of the place, and beyond them, Mr. Loseby's ghastly face. They all stopped in a little cluster at the door of No. 25, and then I saw that two of the hotel servants were carrying something between them on a mattress. Another doctor and some of the chambermaids were following.

"What has happened?" I asked the first person I met. It was the disagreeable looking chambermaid who was hurrying along with a jug of hot water.

"A lady has fallen over the edge of the wall and killed herself. The coastguard found her, and brought her home," she answered curtly.

There was a wet track along the gay new carpet, and up the stairs. It led along over the encaustic tiles of the hall to the door, a trail of dripping garments and trampling feet. The coastguard stood on the steps and another man—a workman in Sunday clothes—beside him.

"He saw her first," said the coastguard, "and gave me a call. The water was just up to her face as she lay"—— He broke off, for Mr. Loseby pressed through the throng of idlers in the doorway and disappeared within the room. A few minutes later the doctor emerged in close consultation with the manager.

"Fatal? Not a bit of it! She'll be all right after a night's sleep. The fall wouldn't kill her. A big stone had got loose and rolled after her, and that stunned her. If she had been left ten minutes or so longer she would have been drowned, I suppose; as it is, beyond some bruises and a possible shock to the nerves, she will be none the worse. You keep that corridor quiet. None of the other rooms are occupied, I hear? Very well. Keep them empty for the present. I'll be round early to-morrow."

The manager interviewed me a little later in the evening and offered me a larger and very much better room in exchange for mine, but I resolutely declined to move. I had begun a sketch from the window and wanted to finish it. He didn't persist. I found heavy curtains hung over the end of the corridor and over the room door when I went up that night, and betook myself noiselessly to bed.

I met the doctor, with whom I was slightly acquainted, next morning, after his visit. "Doing very well," was his reply to my inquiries. "More frightened than hurt. Her husband seems needlessly fidgety. Talks of having further advice—of course I can't object—but there is no real occasion."

"These country doctors!" said Loseby, with much contempt, when I congratulated him on his wife's escape. "What chances can they have of studying the more complicated cases of nerve disease. It is my wife's *mind* I fear for: such a shock may unhinge it utterly. She has been terrified out of her senses, and if her father comes down while she is in this state, I declare I believe it will kill her."

"He is coming?" I asked.

"Of course—we hope so," he answered, turning sharply away into the hotel.

The bright weather held out, and I conscientiously made the most of it—spending another day out of doors and returning at dusk. I stole to my room on tip-toe. All was silent in No. 25, but in a few minutes I saw the curtain over the door drawn aside and the maid's face look out. I kept carefully out of her sight within my half-open door. I don't know why, except that her eyes were so ugly to meet. She came out at last and hurried away rapidly. I wanted a light and some dinner, and prepared to follow her, when I heard a queer noise in the passage like a knocking with a muffled hammer. Beat! Beat! Beat! It was in No. 25. I hurried out. Someone was beating the door panels with the palm of the hand, and a voice—Mrs. Loseby's, grown weak and shaky—was crying inside:

"Oh, who is there? Help me! Let me out! Let me out!"

I saw the key was in the lock of the door, but hesitated to interfere.

The frantic beating re-commenced. "Is anyone there? Help me! Let me out."

"It is I—Paul Sherratt—Mrs. Loseby. What do you want?" I asked—as anyone would have done.

"Let me out. Take me away before they kill me!"

"Here is your maid," I said hastily, for I saw the curtains move at the corridor end. She was silent directly, and I stepped back into my room. The maid was carrying a lamp in front of her, so could see nothing beyond it. I waited till I heard her enter and lock herself in, and then went down. Loseby was dining. I took a seat near him. He looked paler than ever: his eyes were red and the crooked lines about their corners more strongly accentuated. He didn't seem to get on with his dinner, which on the whole showed proper feeling. Poor fellow—why didn't I pity him? His whole air was that of a man devoured by anxiety and eager for sympathy. Directly I spoke of his wife, he broke out with the story of all his woes and perplexities. How could he leave her in the hands of these benighted country practitioners; and yet at the very name of a London physician she had become so alarmed about herself that she had fallen into the very state of nervous agitation it was most desirable to avoid. If he had only any lady friend at hand to consult. He had implored his sister to come, but she couldn't leave her invalid father. I let him run on, listening and sympathizing with one half my brain, while the other was deep in pondering over a question of chirognomy, *i.e.*, whether the lines of the hand can be modified by long-continued effort—as resolute persistence in an expression eventually modifies those of the face. All that I most objected to in Loseby's face disappeared as he spoke with sad earnestness, but the ominous curve of those cruel, clutching fingers remained unchanged.

He departed early that night, to take his share of the watching, and when I passed the veiled door of No. 25, all was quiet.

The next day I went out early and came in late, running against the doctor on the steps. He didn't stop to speak to me, but the manager informed me there had been some unpleasantness between him and Mr. Loseby, who was anxious to take his wife away at once. The doctor had objected strongly; had said it was the worst thing they could do.

I saw Loseby in the smoking-room. He was going to Hastings next morning to see about rooms, and meant to arrange for an invalid carriage and to have a doctor in waiting on their arrival. The maid she had at present would accompany them. He took down my address carefully, and hoped to see me in town, and then said "Good-bye," as it was unlikely we should meet before his departure.

I looked at the door as I passed that night, but all was silent.

I was getting to feel that I had had enough of the place, and to wonder whether it was worth staying till Friday. The next day's sunshine faded at noon, and a cold grey mist blew up from the sea. I hurried back to the Imperial, chilly and discontented, and shut myself in my room, determined to pack up as soon as ever the sketch from my window was completed. The place was intensely quiet. I could hear the bleating of the sheep in a distant field, and the voices of the children calling to one another on the shore. When I began to analyse the indistinct murmurs that fell on my ear, I became aware of something that was not the sea or the buzz of voices in the coffee-room—a subdued, monotonous sound, nearer at hand.

I opened my door and listened.

A woman's voice, unmistakably, that rose and fell in a faint, smothered wail. I walked as noisily as I could down the passage and back, whistling softly.

The wailing ceased suddenly, and then the door was violently, desperately shaken.

"Let me out! Send for the police! Help! Murder!"

"The door is locked," I said, trying it. "How can I help you, Mrs. Loseby?"

"Ah! They have me fast. I shall never go from here but to my grave," she moaned.

"What can I do for you? Tell me quickly," I said.

"Get me something to write with."

I ran to my room, selected paper, envelope, and a long, thin pencil, and going back tried to push them under the door. It fitted all too well over the heavy Saxony carpet. I got them through the keyhole at last. She murmured some eager thanks. "You must return them in the same way," I whispered. "I will watch here and post your letter."

I walked to the far end of the corridor, and pushing aside the curtain, kept watch for some ten minutes; at the end of which I saw the pretty, quaint cap worn by all the chambermaids of the hotel surmounting the ugly, lowering black fringe of Mrs. Loseby's maid emerge from below, just in time to stride back to the door, whisper a word of

caution, and regain my own den before she entered the passage. When I next ventured out, the key was in the lock inside and all was still.

I spent that afternoon hanging about the place, wondering what I ought to do. When, to my relief, I recognised the doctor's neat brougham in waiting at the hotel door, I hurried down and begged a few moments' attention. He listened to all I told him gravely, but with no surprise.

"It is unfortunately the case that the poor lady's brain has not recovered the shock of that night's terror and exposure. She was allowed to get over-excited about something next day, and her husband attributes the distressing consequences to my treatment. I do not attempt to justify myself; I have no occasion to do so; and, personally, I rejoice that he has decided to put the case into other hands, though on the lady's account I feel grave anxiety as to the consequences of the journey."

I thanked him and returned to my painting, working with my door ajar—awaiting events. None befell. Loseby returned late. I avoided seeing him, and kept out of his way during the bustle of departure next morning.

I saw Mrs. Loseby's huge basket-trunks being piled on the private omnibus, in which a couch had been arranged for the invalid. Loseby and the maid ran up and down laden with air-cushions, railway wraps and foot warmers, and, at the last possible moment, poor Mrs. Loseby appeared, cloaked and veiled, and treading falteringly. They supported her carefully to the carriage. I ventured to approach the door and raise my hat in farewell.

"You will find something for you in my room: go and get it," she called out suddenly, sitting bolt upright, her eyes shining bright and eager. Loseby, who had turned to speak to the manager, heard her. "My *dearest!*" he exclaimed, jumping into the carriage hastily. I saw her cower down in her corner as they drove off.

I ran up to their rooms as fast as I could. No. 24, their sitting-room, was empty, with the song I had heard the poor lady sing (could it be only six days ago), lying forgotten on the piano.

No. 25, the bed-room, was in the hands of the chambermaids, who had already stripped the bed and turned the place topsy-turvy.

"Have you seen—a note—or a pencilled scrap—lying about anywhere?" I inquired.

"No, sir. Nothing of the sort." I gave a look into the empty grate and the dust-pan, with no result. My pencil lay on the toilet glass. "Poor lady, she meant that, I suppose," I said, and pocketed it.

Half an hour later, Losthaven and the Imperial lay some twenty miles behind me on the road to London.

That little holiday left an uneasy feeling behind it: and I put away my sketches of the place.

The season began. I found work enough to keep hands and brain

profitably employed: nevertheless, day and night my mind would wander to that unfortunate lady, wondering what had become of her. Some power seemed to be urging me to go back to Losthaven to see —or hear: and there were odd moments when I thought it would prevail. May and June came and went with their sunshine and gaiety and dust, and July followed hot and steaming.

"I want you to take a holiday with me," said a certain amiable, poetic-souled artist-friend of mine, Oscar Schmidt by name, one Friday morning. "I want you to come to-morrow with me to Losthaven."

"Losthaven!" I exclaimed. "Why?"

"To see her: My love."—(He said "loaf," but I knew what he meant.) Oscar was in the habit of making his remarks as curt and impressive as possible. The love was Pauline Archdale. She and her people were staying at the hotel at Losthaven. I told Schmidt I would be ready. We were great friends, he and I. I entered Losthaven this time in blazing sunlight, in a crowded omnibus; Schmidt opposite in gorgeous apparel with a glowing æsthetic neck-tie and tight yellow kid gloves.

The Imperial was adding a wing to itself, half the size of the original building. My old bed-room had been knocked into a passage, and I was put into No. 252, up in the roof.

Oscar, who had been in a sort of stolid flutter all the way from the station, dragged me out forthwith in search of his love, whom we found under the care of a severe mamma on the lawn; half a dozen London aquaintances of theirs and of mine, surrounding them. We all dined together.

My mind was full of Oscar and his hopes when we ascended the well-known staircase that night. He held me by the arm, pouring confidences into my sympathizing ear as I turned mechanically with him down the corridor which once led to my room—and I can conscientiously avow that no thought of my old experiences crossed my mind for an instant.

He came to a sudden stop. "Ah! what am I about? My room is a floor nearer heaven than this." We both laughed, but quietly, as it was discreditably late, and silence and slumber reigned around us. We turned to go back, but stopped again as by one impulse.

"Hark! What was that?"

I felt my breath catch as I heard distinctly the soft beating of a palm on the panels of the closed door on my left hand. It was No. 25.

"Someone called you, Paul," said Schmidt, his eyes wide with astonishment. "But who?"

We listened again. Nothing. We stood some few minutes without speaking or moving. Still nothing. Schmidt laughed, shrugged his shoulders and moved on; I followed more slowly. As we turned from the corridor on to the staircase landing, I heard it again. Beat. Beat. Beat. I ran softly back: it grew louder. The door was shaken

frantically, desperately. I laid my hand on the latch and all was instantly still.

Hurrying off to my room, with a curt adieu to Schmidt, I sat down to hold a serious inquiry into the state of my mind and nerves. Deciding that I was over-tired and that sleep would be out of the question, I filled my pipe and went down, intending to walk the Parade as long as my legs would carry me, and perhaps consult a doctor next morning. Opening my portmanteau in search of a favourite cap, there on the top of my possessions lay the old portfolio of Losthaven sketches. How I had come to pack it, I cannot imagine.

The manager—a new one—was in the hall. He looked surprised when I mentioned my intention of walking the Parade till sunrise, or perhaps later; but was civil. I asked him if he could tell me who had No. 25, now. He referred politely to his books and said "No one."

"When was it last occupied?" I continued. "Not since I have been here," returned he.

"But why not?"

"Pure chance," replied he, sleepily. "We have never been quite full yet."

"A sick lady and her husband occupied those rooms when I was here in February. She had met with an accident. They afterwards went away to Hastings."

"Ay, poor thing, I have heard them talk of it here," said the manager. "She died very soon."

"Died?"

"Yes. I think she only lived a day or two."

Wishing him good-night, I went out to the Parade, mind and brain alike busy.

I saw Oscar off to church in the wake of Pauline next day, and then resolutely made my way to the scene of my last night's fancies. All was light and stir in the corridor. A passing chambermaid smilingly produced her master-key and admitted me into No. 25, at my request, and left me there. I drew up the blind and let in the sunshine, and seating myself in a big chintz-covered chair, began quietly to contemplate my surroundings as one stares at the familiar shapes around one to gather reassurance after the terrors of a dream. A handsomely furnished room. Plenty of looking-glass, carved wood, and Japanese pottery about; evidently one of the grandest rooms the Imperial possessed. I looked at the Indian-patterned chintz, the Empire clock and vases, with a determined interest, and yet all my mind was full, despite myself, of the one dark picture. The helpless victim dying here, inch by inch, under the cruel eyes of her murderers. "Better that he had killed her outright that night," I said, and then started to my feet in consternation at the end to which my vagrant imaginings had led me.

"Killed her? what put such a horrible notion into my head?" I pulled down the blind and left the room at once.

It was impossible to resist a further experiment that night. "Come this way, Schmidt, for a moment," I said, taking his arm and leading him down that accursed corridor, as we were going up to bed. "I want to satisfy myself —— "

"Paul! What is it?" he broke in. "I heard it again. It says 'Help! Murder!'"

I had heard nothing; but, while he spoke, the frantic beating at the door commenced and then the low moaning and wailing.

It sank into silence as we stopped speaking, and we looked at one another in dire amaze.

"I must have that room to-night, whatever it costs," I declared. Oscar cordially approved the idea, and we sought out the manager and effected the change.

Oscar sat talking with me in the bright July moonlight for some hours, which passed in perfect quietness. I told him the story of my previous visit, and showed him my little sketch of Mrs. Loseby which I found in the old portfolio. He was profoundly interested, he averred: but soon his head fell back on the sofa cushion, and he became lost to all outer impressions.

Throwing myself on the bed, I sank into a dreamless sleep, from which I was awakened by a sound as of someone moving near me. "Hallo, Schmidt," I called out. There was no answer. Oscar had got tired of his sofa and retreated to his own room an hour before. "A dream, I suppose," I said to myself. But in the same moment I distinctly heard the sound again. Someone seemed to be moving gently, as with bare feet, across the floor.

I struck a match and lighted a candle. Nothing visible except my own uncomfortable form reflected in a mirror over the fireplace. Then I got up, undressed, and went to bed in earnest, leaving two candles alight near me. Sleep again, not so deep as before on account of the lighted room: and again awakened by the soft patter of footsteps; then the rustle of paper and the cautious closing of a drawer. I was sitting up, wide awake, and staring around before the sound ceased. Silence: emptiness; and the quiet morning light filling every corner of the room through the uncurtained windows.

My night's rest was over now. I got up and dressed, considering the while what I should say to Schmidt. The footsteps all sounded on this side of the room, I thought, between the bed and dressing-table—and then would come the sound of the drawer closing. The toilette table was an elaborate affair with many drawers large and small. I began to pull them open. They were all neatly lined with fresh white lining paper. I looked into every corner and under the lining of each, but saw nothing. Then I pulled them quite out. One stuck fast, and on feeling round its edge I found a sheet of crumpled paper that had got between the drawer and its case. I drew it out care-

fully. It was covered with close pencil writing, quite legible; and I sat down to read it.

"My Dearest Father,—I was a disobedient child to you and I have been rightly punished. I am dying and I don't care to live except to disappoint my wicked, wicked husband. Don't let him have Julius—Don't. He will murder my little boy and then everything will be his. Oh, I have been a foolish woman! I have left him Dooly's guardian, but I thought he was everything that was good. Take care of Julius, dear Papa. When that bad man knows that I have told you, what I solemnly swear is true, that he has tried to kill me — I saw him throw the great stone on me when I was lying where he had pushed me over the sea-wall and where he hoped I should lie till I was drowned — he will not dare to come near my boy. He has given me poison since. I saw him. I am in such pain I do not want to live unless to see my little son once more. *Ask Mr. Paul Sherratt what he knows.* "Your unhappy child,

"Letitia Loseby."

The lines seemed to have been scrawled hastily, but the signature was clear and firm. The sheet of note paper was the one I had given her, bearing my address embossed in one corner. When Oscar came to me in the morning, I was still pondering over this revelation that held the key to the terrible mystery of that closed door.

After consideration, we agreed that I should draw up an account of the whole affair, including my previous acquaintance with the Losebys, but suppressing all reference to the supernatural; which, with the little water colour portrait, Oscar would take to London and convey to old Mr. Weatherhead—who no doubt would be readily found.

"I shall await news from you *here*, at Losthaven, Schmidt," I said. "I must live my fancies down at any risk. I shall sleep in this room every night till I can do so undisturbed."

I am writing there at this moment. On my desk lies a letter, which gives me the information that closes all.

The boy Julius is safe. That scoundrel Loseby had actually commenced to take legal proceedings to obtain possession of the child. All that is at an end. He met Schmidt (unsuspiciously) at Mr. Weatherhead's office, and disappeared immediately, that very day, unable to face further inquiry. The boy is safe. Does the poor mother's anxious spirit rest in peace, or have my morbid fancies gradually worn themselves out for lack of encouragement? Whichever it is, my story ends here.

My light burns low—a cold waning moon looks in on me; in the distance the great clock of Losthaven Church booms a melancholy "Two," and the night and I are alone in the haunted room, Number Twenty-five.

THE EVE OF ST. PARTRIDGE.

By Jean Middlemass.

THERE is much talk of guns, and bags, and birds, and keepers, among the men assembled in the smoking-room at Fotherington Manor on the last evening in August, but expectant though they all are, and excited about the morrow's sport, the name of Mrs. Bulmer wanders in among their sporting conversation very frequently.

Who is Mrs. Bulmer? is a query that passes from lip to lip. Yet no one in the room can answer the question, unless it is a grave, dark man who sits smoking by the window, and has not vouchsafed a remark.

That Mrs. Bulmer is beautiful, very beautiful, no one seems to gainsay, and that she is a widow they all seem to be agreed, since their hostess has told them so; but where she has come from, and why none of them—men about town though most of them are—have ever seen her before, is a mystery which perplexes them not a little.

She does not look more than nineteen, has fair hair, the softest blue eyes, a smile that has already driven Algy Merrick, of the Life Guards, so crazy that, crack shot though he is, it will be strange if he does not miss more than a few birds to-morrow, and she is dressed with a perfection that proclaims her a woman of many resources.

After, Who is she? comes the question, What has she?

But a satisfactory reply was as far off as ever. The dark, grave man smiled as if his own thoughts amused him, but he did not speak. Algy Merrick, however, observed the smile, stealthy though it was.

"Come, come, Arthur, you know all about her. Give us, without further delay, the history of this charming Mrs. Bulmer."

Arthur shook his head. "You fellows have been amusing me for the last half-hour, trying to make a mystery where none exists. Julia Anson, one of the prettiest girls in Cumberland, was married at seventeen to old Bulmer, of Bulmer Court. It is the old story—she married him to save her father, who was a terrible spendthrift, from him, and the old fellow rewarded her by dying at the end of six months, and leaving her a widow with five thousand a-year."

"Five thousand a-year!" The words acted as an electric shock.

"Ay, clear," went on Arthur, taking a long whiff at his meerschaum. "She has no children, and having mourned in privacy for the last eighteen months, she has been induced to accept our hostess, Mrs. Taunton's, invitation, and visit Fotherington Manor for the Feast of St. Partridge."

"And you have known her for a long time?"

"Yes, off and on. I knew her when she was Julia Anson."

"She is charming; positively, absolutely charming!" exclaimed Algy Merrick enthusiastically. His strong encomium, however, only called forth a quick, sharp flash from Arthur's dark eyes, then he half closed them again, and knocking the ashes out of his pipe, he stalked off to bed without vouchsafing another word.

"Queer fellow, Arthur Seymour," said one of the party when he had closed the door. "He is so spasmodic."

"Got something on his mind," remarked another man, "he is as mysterious as Mrs. Bulmer, for say what he likes I feel sure there is a mystery about her and am not so certain that Master Arthur is not mixed up in it."

"Arthur Seymour is not to be allowed to carry off that fair young beauty as a prize for silence, if that is what you mean," cried Algy Merrick. "Why he has not got a rap."

"And you, Algy?" laughed the former speaker. "Yet I shrewdly suspect you have intentions."

"Oh! I—well I have not much money certainly, but I have expectations and——"

"Come, I'll bet you fifty pounds that Arthur has a better chance than you have."

"Done," and Algy Merrick threw up his head, twirled his moustache, and tried to look the thorough lady-killer he believed himself to be. And very good-looking he certainly was in his blue velvet smoking suit with its ruffles of old point.

There was a good deal of laughing over the wager, which was duly booked, and the lookers-on strolled off to bed in full expectation of having some sport that Partridge-tide, which would not come within the range of their double-barrelled Mantons.

Before the clock had struck twelve, all the male inmates of the house had been told of the wager, which was of course to be carefully guarded from the ladies and Arthur. The host naturally was also excluded, but then he was old, and a cypher—merely the host.

Meantime the fair object of all this intrigue had taken off the gauzy white dress in which she had played such havoc with Algy Merrick's heart, and attired in a pale grey dressing-gown, her fair hair forming a natural veil about her shoulders, was sitting by the window gazing for the most part on the starry firmament, though every now and then she turned the page of a book which was lying on her knee.

Mrs. Bulmer had evidently no intention of seeking repose. Her own thoughts seemed to keep her very wakeful, and as she sat there her face, though a bright and joyous one, had obviously for a time been touched by some sorrow which rendered her pensive, almost sad.

One o'clock struck by the little clock on the mantel-piece of her room. For at least half an hour she had not moved. Now she got up, looked out for a second or two into the silent night, and finally closed the window. Just as she did so, a little tap came at the door.

Mrs. Bulmer started as though she were half afraid, and then she uttered a decided "Come in."

A dark, bright-eyed laughing girl obeyed the summons.

"Oh, Julia! I was so afraid you would be asleep, and I have such a bit of fun to tell you."

"Something that will not keep till the morning, Mimi? Why are you not in bed long ago, you naughty child?"

"I am only two years younger than you, Julia, and you are not thinking of sleeping. But never mind—only listen to what I have to tell you." And Mimi Taunton, for Julia's nocturnal visitor was the daughter of the house, knelt down beside the chair into which Mrs. Bulmer had thrown herself.

"You know my boudoir is at the end of the long corridor," began Mimi, in an excited tone; "and in the little room next to it Jack Burnett has been put to sleep, because the house is full and he is only a boy."

"Yes—well?"

"Well, mamma told me I was to write the menus for to-morrow's dinner, and as I intend to pass to-morrow in the woods I thought I would take time by the forelock and do them to-night."

"And what has happened?"

"Just as I had got about half through them I heard an awful noise in the next room. It was Percy Wilmot trying to wake Jack Burnett, who was fast asleep—boys always do want so much sleep."

"And did he succeed?" asked Mrs. Bulmer, half wearied.

"I should think he did, and what he told him you would give your ears to know."

"What was it—though, stop; one ought not to listen."

"I didn't listen, I heard. Boys should be more careful; it is their fault, not mine, if secrets are revealed. This one concerns you. A bet of fifty pounds has been laid about you to-night."

"About me, Mimi? What do you mean?"

"Why, Captain Merrick, whom I rather meant to flirt with myself, has taken a bet with Major Ricketts that he will win you and distance Arthur Seymour, your old friend, whom the Major has a sort of suspicion is in love with you."

Mrs. Bulmer started up from her chair, and catching on to the arm of it as though to steady herself, turned very pale.

"And Arthur—Mr. Seymour—does he know anything of this?"

"Not a word. There would be no fun if he knew. Julia, you must not betray me; you must keep your own counsel and act, not talk. Why, you look quite frightened over it! Now, if it were only me instead of you, what sport it would be. I would teach them to lay wagers about me!"

"I wonder what you would do?" queried Mrs. Bulmer, with a smile.

"Do! Why I would flirt with this impertinent Captain Algy

Merrick till I drove him perfectly silly, and then I would leave him planté là to pay his fifty pounds and be laughed at by all his friends."

"It might be a dangerous game, Mimi. You yourself might have your affections engaged."

"Julia! It cannot be possible that you are in love with Captain Merrick?"

"Why, Mimi, I never saw him in my life till this evening."

"Of course not, how silly I am," laughed Mimi. "Dear me, this is a beginning to our shooting party. You *will* do the thing thoroughly, won't you, Julia?"

Mrs. Bulmer could not help laughing at the girl's energy.

"I'll do the best I can—yes—but there are reasons I cannot explain, which make the position rather difficult. I thank you for warning me, however; you have done me a greater service than you even intended."

And then Mimi kissed her friend, bade her rely on her assistance and silence, and crept very quietly upstairs to her room.

She would perhaps have decided that the hour when her assistance would be acceptable was not so very far distant had she seen Julia Bulmer sink down once more into the chair by the window, and remain there for a long while motionless, lost in such deep, grave thought as the contemplation of no mere country house wager could have produced.

Next morning when the house-party met at breakfast there was still a shadow on Mrs. Bulmer's brow, beautiful though she looked in the dark mourning clothes which she had not yet wholly cast off. Mimi did not fail to notice it, and as she passed her whispered, "Be brave. I will help you."

Next Mrs. Bulmer was seated Algy Merrick. For a few seconds Mrs. Bulmer scarcely noticed him. She seemed absorbed by her own thoughts, but two or three flashing glances from Mimi awoke her to a recollection of what was required of her, and she began to chat very pleasantly with the guardsman. She looked round the table and saw amusement depicted on all the male faces excepting Arthur's; he looked graver and sterner than ever, and during the whole of breakfast was never heard to utter a word.

The start for the woods was made, the ladies from the windows watching the shooters sally forth. Algy Merrick stood till the last moment, leaning against the porch talking to Julia. "We will meet again at luncheon up at Vidal's Bar, where there is a Druid temple," he said, and then he lifted his hat with a grace on which he prided himself, and followed the rest of the party; congratulating himself that he had made so successful a beginning, and already deciding in his own mind that the widow and the wager were won.

As for Arthur Seymour, he did not take the slightest notice of Mrs. Bulmer except when absolute politeness demanded it. Certainly there was nothing in his behaviour that betokened a deep interest in

the young widow, and yet there was not one among all that shooting party but felt intuitively that there was some magnetic power that linked these two together. In no one was the instinct more fully developed than in Mimi; she knew nothing of their antecedent acquaintance, yet she could not help suspecting that Arthur's cool indifference had a good deal to do with Julia's warmth of manner to Captain Merrick.

"It is quite interesting," quoth Mimi to herself, "almost as good as having a love affair of one's own. But I don't mean Algy Merrick to win his wager if I can help it."

So she started forth in search of Julia, and proceeded to pat her, metaphorically, on the back.

"Go on, dear; go on as you have begun. Arthur won't be able to stand it very long. He is frightfully in love I am sure. He will be at your feet before long and Captain Merrick will lose his wager."

"Mimi, what do you mean? What do you know about Arthur. I have not seen him till yesterday—since—since I married Mr. Bulmer; and ——"

"Very likely," returned Mimi. "For all that, you are as much in love with him, as he is with you."

"You are mistaken, Mimi, indeed you are. There is nothing between Mr. Arthur Seymour and me. In fact I think I should be rather fascinated by that good-looking Captain Merrick if I could get over the impertinence of the wager."

"Oh Julia, it isn't true?" and Mimi's laughing face clouded over very perceptibly, and she made up her mind that she would try the effect of a few of her dashing remarks on Arthur. She had known him, more or less, all her life, and was not afraid of his grave, silent ways.

Two days passed, however, and Arthur gave her no opportunity to converse with him, but kept very much aloof from everyone, announcing it as his intention to leave Fotherington Manor on the 4th and go on to another country house about fifteen miles off.

Twice had the whole house-party met for luncheon at Vidal's Bar, and the flirtation between Algy Merrick and the widow was progressing so rapidly that everyone looked on the affair as settled; Major Ricketts' grimness of countenance only being second to that of Arthur whenever he thought of his lost fifty pounds.

Still Algy Merrick had not proposed. Good breeding told him that the time which had elapsed since his introduction to the widow was rather short; and besides there was something in Arthur Seymour's manner which affected his spirits without his exactly knowing why. "He would wait," he thought, "till this kill-joy Arthur had removed himself, which he would do on the morrow, and then the coast being absolutely clear, there would be no farther difficulty about the matter, since he felt quite sure of the lady."

Events, however, were not going to turn out quite as propitiously as Algy expected.

On the morning of the 4th, a telegram was placed before Arthur Seymour while he sat at breakfast. Evidently some event of importance had occurred, for his usually pale face grew crimson as he read it, but he thrust it hastily into his pocket without uttering a word. Only towards the end of breakfast he said to his hostess:

"I am afraid, Mrs. Taunton, you will be saddled with me till the evening. Some news I have just received necessitates an entire change in my plans."

"My dear Arthur, you know this house is yours to go and come as you like. You have had no bad news, I hope?"

"My uncle, Sir Wilfrid Grant, is dead," returned Arthur, sadly. "I must go North without delay."

"Your mother's brother?"

"Yes. My mother was with him when he died. She telegraphs to me to come to her at once; but there is no quick train from here till the evening. I know that, from past experience."

This announcement of Arthur's cast an inevitable shade over the whole party, but more especially on Algy Merrick, who had expected Arthur to leave early, when he intended to avoid the shooters under the pretext of being tired, and devote the morning to winning his cause with the widow.

Now breakfast was no sooner over, and the party separated about in different quarters, than Mrs. Bulmer sought Arthur Seymour out in the library, where he was sitting alone writing letters in connection with the recent event. They had scarcely spoken for days, but Julia had known Arthur too long not to feel that it was imperative she should go and condole with him in his sorrow; more especially as Sir Wilfrid Grant's place adjoined Bulmer Court, and she was really sorry about the old man's death.

He looked up when she entered, and started as though he had seen a ghost.

"Julia—Mrs. Bulmer!"

"I have come to tell you, Arthur, how much I condole with you in your grief," she said, very simply; calling him by his Christian name as she had done from childhood.

"Ay, it is true I need condolence, though, perhaps, scarcely from you." And having fixed his eyes once more on his papers, he did not attempt to raise them.

"Not from me? What have I done to displease you? Oh, Arthur, why are you so changed, so unkind to me? But it does not matter. I only came to tell you I was sorry about poor Sir Wilfrid; since you do not wish to hear it, I will not intrude." And she turned to leave the room.

Another moment and he was by her side.

"Julia, tell me the truth. Do you not love Algy Merrick?"

"It can matter but little to you whom I love," she answered.

"Not matter! Have I not loved you for years? When you

married Bulmer, did I not go abroad in the vain hope of forgetting you, and nearly die of brain fever at Genoa."

"And when you recovered, and came back to England, I was a widow," she suggested with some archness, yet blushing vividly.

"Yes, a rich widow, and I was a poor man. You were farther off from me than ever."

Mrs. Bulmer stood looking at him in a state bordering on bewilderment.

"And this was the reason of your coldness and estrangement?" she said at last. "My poor Arthur, how I have misjudged you! And now ——"

"Now I am no longer a poor Admiralty clerk, but my uncle's heir; while you have, I believe, already pledged your word to Algy Merrick."

"I have no more intention of marrying Captain Merrick than of performing a journey to the moon," she said, advancing to the open window as she spoke. "I have only been tantalising him into the belief that he has won a wager of fifty pounds."

As she finished the sentence, a figure flitted across the verandah only a few yards from where Julia Bulmer was standing. It was Algy Merrick. He had heard every word of that last sentence. Luckily he did not stop for more, or the shout of joy which Arthur uttered might have shattered his nerves, and the sight of Julia in Arthur's arms, in which she was encircled not two minutes later, might have paralysed him for life.

As it was, it was Algy Merrick, not Arthur Seymour who was called away from Fotherington Manor by important business that morning. When the shooters returned, Major Ricketts found a check for fifty pounds lying in an envelope on his table, with only the one word "Lost," for explanation.

That Mrs. Bulmer had refused him was the general supposition among the smokers that evening, for it was not till long after the party had broken up that the mystery was fully cleared by a paragraph in the *Morning Post* to the effect that Mrs. Bulmer, of Bulmer Court, was about to be led to the altar by Mr. Arthur Seymour.

Of course, Mimi was asked to be principal bridesmaid, but she gave it as her intention that she would have nothing whatever to do with the wedding unless Captain Algy Merrick was invited, and being a young lady of much decision of character, she carried her point. The result of the gay doings at Bulmer Court is, that another wedding may be expected before the season is over—at least, so wise folks say

STRESS OF WEATHER.

By the Author of "Countess Violet."

OF course it was very cold, but fine seasonable weather. So said each of the three middle-aged gentleman as they drew themselves up for a final warm at their dining-room fires, waited on by such feminine slaves as happened to exist for them in the shape of wives, daughters or housekeepers. What a hero a man must feel who sees his mittens laid in the fender, his great coat heated, and regretful admiration in the surrounding countenances!

Arrived at the Railway Station, and deprived of their natural worship, these three men were just as ordinary, comfortable looking citizens as you could well meet with. They were all strangers to each other and chanced at the same hour to book themselves for Paddington; all doing it cheerily, for how could *they* tell what was going to happen? There was a look of having outwitted somebody—a complacent look—on Mr Dolman's countenance as he pocketed his ticket and purchased his newspaper. "I'll drop in upon them before breakfast," he muttered to himself, with a self-satisfied nod. Mr. Weaver secured neither a *Times* nor a *Telegraph* but the latest edition of a scientific journal. Mr. Podbury supplied himself with *Punch*, *Fun*, and *Truth;* laughter and polite lies being his usual requirements for a happy journey.

Then these three middle-aged gentlemen got into the same first-class compartment, obtained steaming hot tins for their feet, and occupied the minutes, before starting on their sixty mile journey, in rolling themselves in stout railway rugs. The whistle sounded, the train moved with a prophetic groan, and each man like a true Briton opened wide his newspaper and shut out any possible sight of his fellow-travellers.

An hour later the newspapers are dropped, and the gentlemen are all silently engaged in forming their own private opinions as to the meaning of a very fierce wind that has risen, and is now engaged in blowing snow as fine as sifted sugar through the cracks in the carriage windows. Mr. Podbury, indeed, changed his seat, having a clear objection to being ornamented like a Christmas cake. At last he—the most genial of the three men—spoke.

"Never saw such a sky! Full of snow!"

"Humph! think it's getting thicker?" inquired Mr. Dolman.

"Thicker, sir?" broke in Mr. Weaver, solemnly. "There are evidences about us that the elements are preparing for a struggle—a great struggle, sir."

At this pronounced opinion from so evidently scientific a man, Mr.

Dolman looked in amazement at his opposite neighbour. Mr. Podbury laughed cheerily.

"Good gracious! Cats and dogs, I dare say, in snow form!" A great swirl of wind drove the snow hard against the glass as he spoke, and, for a minute or so, the windows were blinded. Slower and slower moved the train, and finally stopped.

"What now?" cried Mr. Dolman, as he and Mr. Podbury thrust their heads out of opposite windows, and as suddenly drew them in again. A guard plodding his way along, and bending to the tempest, showed the most remarkable instance of railway-official-forbearance on record, for he waited to hear and answer the two gentlemen, who now tried to thrust their two heads out of one and the same window.

"Why have you stopped, guard?" asked the one.

"Why don't you go on, guard?" asked the other.

"We're fast in a drift, sirs, and can't get no further."

At this astounding news, the questioners became momentarily dumb; even from Mr. Podbury's cheerful face the light died out.

"It's disgraceful!—to-day of all days, guard!—I shall be too late, after all!" burst forth Mr. Dolman in angry reproach. But the guard passed quietly onwards, and the gentlemen shut up the window.

The only one of the three who wore an air of comfort and composure was Mr. Weaver. He read a short paragraph in his scientific journal, and murmured to himself.

"Most interesting! Wonderful!"

"What is, sir?" testily inquired Mr Dolman. "Our being stuck in the snow?" Mr. Weaver glanced up from his reverie with a mild remark. "I have been engaged for some years in the study of the Glacial Period, sir. As it was in the past it will undoubtedly be again. I see a beautiful corroboration in the scene around me of the evident near approach of the extraordinary cold phenomena we are led by the most learned of our men to expect."

"Every one to his taste," cried Mr. Podbury, shivering. "I hate ice myself," and he drew out a well-filled pocket-flask. Mr. Dolman, evidently put out by some private, serious complication, frowned and glowered silently. The snow was getting uncommonly deep, and presently the guard appeared again.

"No chance of moving, gentlemen, till we can get some men to dig us out. Nearest station just one mile off." And away he went.

"Does the fellow think we can walk?" demanded Mr. Dolman of Mr. Podbury.

"No, no. We must grin and bear it."

"I *can't* bear it, sir!" said Mr. Dolman unreasonably. "If I don't get to Paddington in an hour, my niece and my niece's fortune will be lost to me for ever."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Podbury, with keen pleasure at the chance of a little amusing scandal, "how's that, sir?" Even the Glacial Period man looked across with mild interest.

"My niece, a charming young lady, is also my ward," said Mr. Dolman. "I have always intended that she should marry my son. Unfortunately I was persuaded to allow the girl to visit her aunt—one of those dreadful women who act for themselves, and think they are cleverer than *men*; and, under this misguided person's roof, she has been permitted to renew a girlish love affair of which I had entirely disapproved, and put a stop to. The result is, that they are to be married this morning at Paddington church at half-past eleven. A clerk of mine found that out and telegraphed for me, so that I might be in time to stop the mischief. And I should have been in time, but for this—this——" and finding no adequate word ready to express his wrath, Mr. Dolman glared fiercely out at the fair but impeding snow wreaths.

"It's an ill-wind that blows nobody any good," smiled Mr. Podbury, with an attempt at pleasantry, which the aggrieved uncle bitterly resented. "How jolly glad the young couple will be, sir, when they hear that you stuck fast on the right side of Reading!"

"Ugh!" growled the miserable Mr. Dolman. "Her money's all tied up! that's one comfort; young Weaver can't make ducks and drakes of it!"

"Weaver, sir?" said the scientific gentleman, with difficulty recalling himself from antediluvian dreams, "that's my name—and my son, Tom Weaver, of the Engineers, is going to be married to-day. I was on my way to be present at the wedding. He is a downright good fellow, sir, and the pretty young girl is Mary Dolman."

"Good gracious!" cried Mr. Podbury, laughing heartily, "one on his way to assist, the other to prevent, and both stopped by the snow! Ha! ha! ha! I must say it's good!"

If Mr. Dolman could have roasted Mr. Podbury, and converted Mr. Weaver into a permanent glacial monument, he would have done it. That he should in his storm-bound desperation have confided his hopes and their disappointment to the father of that young rascal, Weaver!

But the snow got worse and worse. They reached Reading towards nightfall, and there Mr. Dolman stopped, wildly desirous to send off telegrams; one of reproach to his wicked niece, one to his home to say he was not *lost*. As the wires were damaged by the storm, he could not send either. He made his way to an hotel in the town, and went to bed, roughly desiring the chambermaid not to call him until the line was clear for him to get home. As the young woman did not know where he lived, she wisely remarked that it might be a week or more; to which he sulkily replied he didn't care if it was ten. The girl looked a moment at the door as it closed, and then nodded her head knowingly.

"'E looks old, but there's no mistake in the symptoms. 'E's bin and proposed to someone, and she won't have him!"

THE ARGOSY.

FEBRUARY, 1883.

WINIFRED POWER.

CHAPTER IV.

MARTHA'S SHAME.

WHEN John Hatherley rode into the town, the morning after his father's death, he was the object of general and respectful sympathy. Two such events as Martha Freake's arrest and Mr. Hatherley's death, following immediately one upon the other, had not happened in Marleyford for a long time. The little town really felt as if it had pressure on the brain. How Martha was looking, what doing, saying, thinking behind her prison walls—how the Hatherleys were behaving inside their darkened house: such were the two subjects full of delightful mystery. John, in his new character of master and chief mourner, became most interesting; and wherever he stopped on his way to the magistrates' room, words of condolence greeted him.

Fresh excitement was presently caused by the rumble of a stately vehicle up the High Street, and its instant recognition as the Hatherley carriage, as it drew up at the court. Who was inside it? Could it be Miss Hatherley? Then followed a thrill of commotion as its occupant was recognised for Martha Freake. John, looking sad but admirable, hurried forward to help his cousin out, and while the bystanders are struck dumb at his goodness, Martha, thickly veiled and visibly trembling, shuffles along and disappears.

When John looked at her, even he was shocked at the change which twenty-four hours had made. Not so much agitated, humiliated, bewildered was she, as simply scared out of all possibility of thought. She mechanically did as she was told; sat down in the chair pointed out to her; answered all the questions addressed to her; but not frankly and fearlessly as the consciousness of her innocence should have made her so do. Rather did she seem held back from replying by some unseen terror. And it would have been touching to mark,

had anybody there been capable of marking, or in the secret, how little the thought of betraying Mary Hatherley occurred to her.

Of course the magistrates, of whom Mr. Ormerod was one, were very kind and considerate to her. This they would have been in any case, out of respect for Martha's position as well as for that of the Hatherleys. But the poor little woman had been so familiar a figure to them for years; they had felt, quite unconsciously, so much reverence for her simple goodness; that the sight of her there, and the necessity of investigating the charge against her, were things exquisitely painful.

"Have you nothing to say in your own defence, Miss Freake?" asked Mr. Ormerod when the case had been fully gone into, and John had related the circumstances attendant upon his receipt of the threatening letter, and the steps he had taken to trace the writer of it.

She glanced round with a hunted look for a moment, almost as if fearing that the question might be a trap; then hung her head and murmured: "I was told to go and fetch the letter."

"By whom?" She was silent.

"Were you ignorant of its contents?"

"Yes."

"Were you positively not aware that the letter, to which it was a reply, was written with the view of extorting money?"

"I was not aware of that."

"Then you mean us to understand that the threatening letter was not written by you?"

"Yes."

"Did you suspect its true author?"

Martha made a nervous movement with her hands. "I knew nothing about it; nothing," she said, her voice trembling with distress.

"But, Miss Freake," expostulated Mr. Ormerod, "cannot you understand that by persisting in this vague denial, not stating why you should have gone to the post-office for the letter, or who sent you, you place us in a most perplexing and painful position? Either you are guilty, or you are not guilty. If you will not speak, and clearly, we have no choice but to commit you for trial."

She became violently agitated; her whole fragile frame shook.

"I will speak," she cried wildly, "but not here, not now. It is all a mistake; you must see that. Let me go home, I pray you, to Mary. I am not guilty; I have never done wrong, and I cannot bear this. I want to be with Mary Hatherley."

Her one thought was to escape from the horrible publicity and the cruel strangeness of her present position. Once back in the old home, among the familiar faces of those who knew and, as she, poor soul thought, loved her, it seemed to her impossible but that this appalling nightmare should pass away. The very walls must bear testimony for her there, where she had lived, from whence she had gone forth on

missions of charity, and whither she had returned in joy and thankfulness when the good day's work was done.

"I must bind you over in two sureties to appear for trial at the Assizes, Miss Freake," resumed Mr. Ormerod reluctantly.

"Then I need not go back to prison," exclaimed Martha, seizing upon this idea.

"Not if you can find the sureties."

"I will be one," interposed John Hatherley.

"And I the other," added the Rector, Mr. Stratton, who was present.

Martha was released. Her manner grew more natural immediately, like that of a lost child that has suddenly caught sight of its mother amid a group of questioning, strange faces.

But she was not to be taken back to Mary. John had arranged that, in a few rapid words with Mr. Stratton. He put her into the carriage and bid her wait. Then he returned to the Justice room, where the gentlemen were talking.

"One is always unwilling to believe such charges against a person of position," the Rector was saying. "I do not know what to think of her manner. Can she have been made a tool of?"

"That is precisely what I have been asking myself," interposed John, with his usual air of grave candour. "I am unwilling, except indeed on the supposition of insanity, to believe my poor cousin capable of such an act. But then come the questions: who has played upon her credulous good-nature, and who can so influence her as to ensure her silence? It is preposterous to think that she would willingly sacrifice herself to the extent of taking upon her own shoulders the guilt of another."

"Can there be a man in the matter? You understand me: a—an *affaire de cœur?*" suggested Mr. Ormerod profoundly.

A little stir of amusement greeted the words; even John smiled.

"I do not think Martha loves anybody but Mary and myself," he replied.

"Then I give it up," said Mr. Ormerod. As did the others. For John, as the prosecutor, could clearly not be the instigator; and as for his sister, like Cæsar's wife, she was above suspicion.

"This is altogether so very distressing a business, especially at this moment, that it is a relief to think my cousin will be with you and Mrs. Stratton," said John as he walked with the Rector back to the carriage. "You must let me know in confidence anything that she may say. But I do fear her mind is unhinged."

The Rector promised his best services, being indeed only too gratified to think that he was obliging John Hatherley.

"You must be overwhelmed with painful business of one sort and another, Mr. John. Your father's death; and now, this!"

"The worst times have an end," said John.

Martha on finding herself at the Rectory, sank into a mournful

silence. She gently answered all observations made to her, but only volunteered one request: which was to beg that Mary might be sent for. The fussy, ostentatious benevolence of Mr. Stratton towards her, and the unconcealed curiosity of his wife, repelled her confidence. They were a thousand miles from suspecting this, of course. They thought indeed, worthy people, that they were behaving with admirable kindness and tact.

They could not know that, abruptly wrenched from her old associations, she was divorced from the greater part of herself. Of her real, gentle personality nothing asserted itself with any vividness in these days, but one intolerable sense of tragic loss and shame. And this feeling was itself so bound up with her old life and all its affections that she remained strangely indifferent to the sympathy or possible blame of those outside her house. It was of this she thought perpetually; of the work that she had done in it; of her little room bright with flowers and birds; of the servants who had waited on her so willingly. Above all, she thought of Mary. To see *her* was her one great longing. With Mary's arm round her, with Mary's eyes looking forgiveness for her confession, she would speak. But in this harsh world of strangers where she drew her breath in pain, to lift up her voice in shrill self-justification was to her impossible. She felt too crushed, too bewildered. She was, in fact, concentrated almost to the verge of insanity, and they simply thought her sullen.

Mary Hatherley little guessed how well she had been served by her determination not to bring her victim home. She had shrunk from the thought of meeting her, in the selfishness of her weak, unworthy nature. John had pointed out to her the danger of Martha's speaking, but even this consideration was not strong enough to overcome her reluctance. If Martha did speak, she and John could deny: but, of that, they both knew there was little fear: Martha Freake would never betray Mary.

Under the eyes of her victim she could not keep up the farce of her own innocence. Martha's presence and tears would distress her; and she would be weak (she was within an ace of thinking *generous!*) enough to blurt out everything. And that would be very foolish; needless also, for John would be sure to arrange matters and get Martha off scot-free. And borne up by this persuasion, in her pallor, her languor and her mourning, Mary presented a very interesting and a genuinely sad appearance to the few visitors admitted to Hatherley House on the days succeeding her father's death.

To Martha she wrote, saying that as soon as the funeral was over, she would visit her. Buoyed up by this hope the patient woman waited.

Marleyford, now that Miss Freake was committed for trial, turned its interest from her to Mr. Hatherley's will. How he would leave his property; whether the distant reprobate, his son William, would be well remembered by him; what Mary's share of the family wealth

might be; and what measure of responsibility would devolve upon John.

After the funeral, when Mr. Luscombe, the family lawyer, found only an old will was produced, he looked greatly surprised.

"Your father made a second will, about a month since," he said curtly. Only Mary and John and the servants were present; for the funeral guests had left, and of distant relatives, beyond Ralph Mercer and Martha Freake, the Hatherleys had none.

"A second will?" repeated John. "I have found none but this. Perhaps he deposited the second will with you?"

"If he had, I should have brought it with me," retorted Mr. Luscombe, irritated at the superfluous suggestion. "As you must well know, he had a mania for keeping possession of his own papers."

"Quite so," assented John. "And I found this will in the private bureau with other important documents. I am sure the second will would have been there had he preserved it; but he probably destroyed it."

Mr. Luscombe looked strangely unassentient, even a little suspicious. "Why should he destroy it?"

John slightly shrugged his shoulders. "He appears to have been in several minds about his property, just before the end. The very evening of his death, Mary found him drawing up a third will: which *he certainly* destroyed."

"Certainly?"

"No doubt. When we were summoned by the noise of his fall, I noticed that the bureau, near which he was standing, was open, and in the grate were several half-consumed papers."

"Humph!" Mr. Luscombe glanced at Mary, but she sat like a graven image in her deep mourning, her face framed with its golden hair. The colour had indeed flushed once or twice into her cheeks at some of John's answers. But no other sign of protest broke from her, for her brother's glacial glance held her terror-stricken and mute. The lawyer pondered for a few moments; then with the gesture of a man who dismisses a subject of perplexity from his mind, he turned to the will lying before him on the table, and began to read it aloud. It was brief, but astounding, and may be summarily described by saying that with the exception of a few legacies to servants and others, John was left sole legatee. Mary and William were disinherited.

For one moment after the lawyer's tones ceased, Mary sat quite silent. When she found voice at last it was only to utter a half-stifled cry of rage. She was so deadly pale that they thought her on the verge of fainting and hurried towards her in alarm. John himself approached her and laid his hand upon her arm.

At the touch she shrank away, and burst into one of her storms of rage, her words coming so fast as almost to choke her voice.

She would dispute the will, she cried; she would write to Jamaica, and bring William home. *These* were never her father's

intentions. The servants could testify to so much. And when she told all she knew the world would believe her.

"Dear! dear! dear!" exclaimed Mr. Luscombe, shaking his head and looking very much distressed. He had old-fashioned notions of the conduct becoming in young ladies, and was dreadfully shocked to see the beautiful Miss Hatherley behave like a mænad.

Mary's exclamations subsided at length into angry sobs. John's smooth voice then broke the silence.

"I am not surprised that my sister should be disappointed. I can only hope that when her present excitement has calmed down, she will understand how little intention I have of behaving otherwise than generously." Mary lifted her face from her handkerchief, met her brother's eyes, and buried it again. "I think," resumed John, again addressing the lawyer, "that my poor father probably did half repent himself at odd moments of his harshness. Perhaps the second will you mention was more favourable to my brother and sister?"

"Not a whit," answered Mr. Luscombe briskly.

John raised his eyebrows. "My father must have destroyed it."

The lawyer advised its being looked for; and a thorough search was instigated. It lasted all that day and the next, but remained thoroughly unsuccessful. Mary meanwhile had time for reflection. John was careful to remind her constantly in a thousand subtle ways how completely she was in his power; and the dominion over her of his superior calmness increased with every hour. Mr. Luscombe—very suspicious at last about the wills, although long unwilling to be so—tried to elicit some light from her, but failed. She even disavowed the words which had fallen from her in her rage. The servants, grateful for their legacies and anxious to conciliate the heir, were equally discreet; Mr. Luscombe, although his secret thoughts were many and he asked John a few questions which surprised him, could but accept the facts as they stood.

Poor William Hatherley blustered a little from Jamaica when the news reached him; but having no money and no credit, he could not come over: and finally, on John's promising to supply his wants in the present and to look after his wife and children should he die, he followed the general example and sank into quiescence.

The only will found was, in consequence, proved: and one or two of its clauses as well as its general disposition gave Marleyford something to talk about. To this subject we will return later: suffice it to say for the present that John covered himself with fresh glory by the munificence of his conduct towards his brother and sister; and everybody was enraptured at the sweetness of Miss Hatherley in accepting her disinheritance and showing no resentment.

We must now go back to Martha Freake: who for the days before Mr. Hatherley's funeral, and for some weary ones after it, sat counting the hours for her meeting with Mary. Twice had the visit been promised, then deferred. But at last Mary came.

They fell weeping into one another's arms. All the pent-up anguish and bewildered, unanswered questioning of days found vent in the passionate outburst of sobs with which Martha clung to her cousin. And there was comfort for her in the responsive emotion that shook Mary's frame. Ah! she was not heartless; she would speak, and this long nightmare would dissolve for ever.

"Oh Patty, I am so unhappy!" sobbed Mary, finding words.

Martha's tender heart overflowed at this announcement. She noted with loving compassion her darling's altered air; she stroked her golden curls, and held her hands. Never doubting but that Mary's sorrow was all for her, she was filled with remorse and gratitude.

"You have heard?" said Miss Hatherley at last, disengaging herself from these caresses, and lifting her lovely eyes, full of the languor of regret, to the poor, deprecating face.

"Heard?" Martha had heard many new things of late. The world seemed topsy-turvy.

"How shamefully I have been treated: cut off with a shilling," added Mary in indignant explanation.

Martha stepped backwards. It was very selfish of her, of course; but she had really been thinking of herself, of her own trouble.

"What enrages me the more is that I know it is John's doing," continued Mary, and went off into a confused, fretful monologue. Martha listened like one in a dream. She had not expected this. Not all the experiences of the past days had affected her like this discovery of Mary's callousness.

"And what are you going to do for me?" she abruptly asked, cutting short the string of lamentations. Mary looked up quite startled; the tone of the question was so new from those lips. In Martha's eyes was a strange sternness, and the other shrank before it.

"You will not betray me?" she faltered.

"Betray you?" Martha echoed the words bitterly. "You seem to forget that it is I who am betrayed."

Mary broke out into protest. How could she say such things, or think them? Of course everything would come right in the end. John had promised all that: only Martha must have patience. As for the charge, it was preposterous: as all the world saw. But it must not transpire that she, Mary, had any knowledge of the letter. That would make too dreadful a sensation in Marleyford. What would the Ormerods think—and Walter Russell—and everybody? Martha had always been goodnatured? Surely she was not going to change in the face of such a crisis? Mary's voice rose as she concluded. But Martha sat very quiet, very pale, but unshaken.

"Justice must be done to me," she said. "I have been silent because I believed in your honour. Now that it has failed me, I shall speak."

"You seem quite to overlook the fact that nobody will believe you."

The cruel words, wrung from Mary by the sheer spitefulness of abject

fear, had hardly been uttered before she repented them. For Martha rose trembling in every limb, dumb, stricken to the heart, but with a glance so full of mournful majesty and of pitying scorn, that it was like an avenging angel's : and Mary's mean soul cowered beneath it.

With a convulsive sob she actually fell on her knees and clutched her cousin's hand.

"Oh Patty, dear Patty ! have pity on me ! Do not betray me. I shall be ruined. I shall have to leave Marleyford, and John will make my conduct an excuse not to give me a penny. Everybody will shun me. Even Ralph will not marry me then, perhaps. I shall starve. I shall be driven to despair—perhaps to suicide—I ——"

"And I ?" interrupted Martha. "Have I no right to happiness and consideration, and the respect of my fellow men ? Is scorn less cutting, ruin less ruinous, shame less shameful, because the spirit stricken is mine, not yours ? Shall I not suffer from outrage and privation and want ? May I not be driven to suicide ? Will the path be easier to tread for my feet than for your own ? "

Mary sat silent, startled at the tragic ring of the words, but pettishly resentful of their unexpected eloquence. Martha again spoke.

"You have not answered me. Why am I to sacrifice my fair fame to yours ? "

At the unconscious irony of the question, Mary took refuge in tears. Life had become an inextricable web of cross-purposes.

"You are so high-flown, and exaggerated, and—and unkind," she sobbed sullenly. "Who w—wants you to sacrifice your fame ? Such a ridiculous expression ! When I have told you that—that John will get you off the charge."

"By some lie," commented Martha, rendered wonderfully clear-sighted of late.

"You are so altered," wailed Mary, wincing a little. "I *never* thought you would object to save me—only just to keep silent and let matters take their course. You used to love me. I think now you must only want to disgrace me."

"It is myself I want to save from disgrace, child," answered Martha, with a sudden change of tone. Then to Mary's amazement—not unmixed, sooth to say, with some secret terror—she took her flushed, tearful face between her hands and turned it towards the light. Mary blanched under the glance that travelled slowly over her features.

"Pretty, golden-haired thing ! Pretty, shallow, flimsy piece of human nature ! " exclaimed Martha at last. "Perhaps you are right after all, and disgrace would be absurdly heavy for you. Well, you can go. We have seen the last of one another ; the last in any real sense."

"And what are you going to do ? " inquired Mary.

"I shall defend myself."

"It will be too late."

"Perhaps so, for the world's verdict. But that is a small matter. What is the world now to me ? " Martha sat down by the table as

she spoke, and laid her face upon her crossed arms. The waters of bitterness were closing over her soul. Mary crept to the door, opened it softly, and found herself with a sense of relief in the passage.

Mrs. Stratton hurried forward obsequiously; the children came up with smiles and glances of shy admiration for the beautiful Miss Hatherley. In that atmosphere of flattery Mary regained her usual self-complacency: and the closed door between herself and Martha shut out also the consciousness of her crime. For moral sense with her meant only the approval of the world.

CHAPTER V.

"DEAF AND DUMB."

As the time for Martha Freake's trial drew near, public opinion became on the whole unfavourable to her.

"Guilty, no doubt," said Marleyford, almost ashamed of its first compassion. "She never was really *anybody*, poor thing, and the luxury of her life at the Hatherleys' must have demoralised her."

When the eventful day dawned at last, the court was crowded to suffocation; the interest was intense, and had extended itself to the county town. It was generally known that the defence was to be largely based on the plea of insanity; and John had talked so much about his cousin's remarkable eccentricity, that the more obliging or the more ingenuous spirits among his acquaintances had recalled several odd traits in Miss Freake's character, and declared themselves to have been much struck with them at the time.

With all this, it may be imagined what curiosity was felt to see how Martha would look at her trial. And her appearance surpassed expectation. She was worn to a shadow; deadly pale but for a settled flush on each cheek, and her eyes, painfully bright, had one fixed, startled stare. When asked to plead, she said "Not Guilty."

Inspector Roberts stated that on receipt of information furnished him by Mr. John Hatherley, he had gone to the Marleyford post-office and had there found the prisoner. She was asking for a letter addressed to "X. Y. Z." She appeared more bewildered than frightened when he arrested her, but had only said, "You will see it is all a mistake."

John Hatherley next appeared. He looked very handsome, very grave and dignified, with an air of becoming concern; and he gave his evidence, as the papers all said, "with evident reluctance."

One morning he had received by post a communication in a disguised hand, threatening him vaguely with exposure of his private affairs, his "secrets," as the letter put it, unless by a certain day (named) an answer, containing £50 was sent to Marleyford post-

office addressed to the initials "X. Y. Z." Scenting a conspiracy, he had placed the matter in the hands of the police.

The cross-examination of the counsel for the prosecution elicited from him three special facts, of which the connection was not immediately visible. These were, first, that he suspected nobody in particular of the authorship of the threatening letter; secondly, that Martha Freake had superintended the establishment at Hatherley House and dispensed the housekeeping moneys; thirdly, that a certain bill of £50 to a builder had never been paid.

Martha's face showed some slight glimmer of indefinable emotion; and her counsel, Mr. Wharton, made a movement of surprise. It was his turn now to cross-examine, and he rose. After one or two apparently unimportant questions, he asked in a brisker tone:

"Then, do you positively assert, Mr. John Hatherley, that you suspected no person at all as the writer of the letter?"

"I positively assert it."

"You have no knowledge of any spiteful persons, who may bear a grudge against you, and ——"

Of course the counsel for the prosecution interfered at this point, and the Judge ruled that the question was not a fair one. Whereupon Mr. Wharton, with a shrug of his shoulders, fell back upon those generalities which are probably good as evidence to the legal mind, but which to the uninitiated appear so hopelessly vague.

"Then it absolutely never occurred to you, witness, that the person to present herself at the post-office would be the prisoner?"

"It never occurred to me."

"You have said that the prisoner had for fifteen years lived in your father's family and superintended the household. Also that a great deal of money passed through her hands. Did she not always render an accurate account of the sums expended?"

"Yes," replied John. Then after a slight pause, he added, "generally."

He spoke the word quite quietly, apparently without obvious intention. Perhaps it was only that barely-perceptible previous pause which made it sound sinister; but as a matter of fact it had a very bad effect.

The wiseacres among the audience shook their heads, and the prisoner nervously clutched the iron bar in front of her. She began to tremble all over with uncontrollable agitation, looking, as many people whisperingly asserted at that moment, "really guilty."

"What do you mean by 'generally?'" asked the counsel, sharply.

"I mean almost always," replied John.

"I must trouble you to be more explicit. Did the prisoner at any time not render such account to you?"

"You have just heard that on one occasion she did not."

"I wish to hear it again."

Whereupon John, under pressure of further interrogation, related how he had owed £50 to one Smithson, a builder; how the man had asked to be paid in money and not by cheque; how John, driving with his sister and Miss Freake that day into town, had stopped at the bank and drawn £100 in notes. He kept £50 himself, and had given the other £50 into Miss Freake's hands, requesting her, as he was himself just leaving by train for London, to call round and pay Smithson his account. Hearing no more from the builder, he concluded that this had been done.

"When was this, witness?"

"Shortly before my father's death. Not many days, I think, before I received the threatening letter."

"When did you discover that the bill had not been paid?"

"Only yesterday," replied the witness. "To my surprise, Mr. Smithson stopped me in the street with a renewed request for the money."

This story created great excitement. Its significance was borne in gradually upon the audience as each fresh answer to the keen questions of the cross-examining counsel only established John's testimony the more firmly. Young Mr. Hatherley's manner was quite that of a man who feels fully all his responsibilities.

The missing £50, lost or otherwise disposed of by Martha, supplied that motive for the anonymous letter, which even the most eager of her non-partisans had hitherto felt to be wanting.

Mr. Wharton scribbled some notes, and addressed himself once more to John.

"Do you mean to say that you never asked the prisoner if she had paid the money?"

"I took it for granted that she had."

"And did you, a man of business, not ask for the receipt?"

"All receipted bills, by whomsoever paid, were strung upon a file in my father's study. Had I thought about the receipt of the £50, it would have been to conclude that it was there with the others."

"Are you prepared to state that the notes, making up this £50, passed through no hands but your own and the prisoner's?"

"I have stated all I know," answered John, evidently getting tired, but too well-bred to show it.

"Please to be explicit, witness. Do you positively state that the notes passed only through your hands and Miss Freake's?"

"I do positively state it," said John icily.

"You can go, sir," said the counsel. "I have nothing more to ask." Whereupon John stepped out of the witness-box; and, exchanging grave salutes with his acquaintances, passed from the respectful and admiring eyes of the crowd.

Next in order Mr. Smithson was called. His evidence did not amount to much, but it was chiefly confirmatory of John's.

Had asked to be paid in notes as more convenient; had thought

it strange when the money was not forthcoming; but had refrained from pressing out of his great respect for the Hatherley family. Then occurred the lamented death of the head of the house, which made him still more unwilling to mention so trifling a matter as a forgotten bill. But yesterday, chancing to meet young Mr. Hatherley in the street, he had ventured upon a reminder, when Mr. Hatherley said he had sent him the money several weeks ago: Mr. Russell, who was arm-in-arm with Mr. Hatherley, had confirmed this. Upon being asked how Mr. Russell had confirmed this, the witness said that Mr. Russell had exclaimed in surprise, "Why, I saw you give the money to Miss Freake for Smithson two months ago. You remember, I was standing by the carriage at the moment?" And Mr. Hatherley said that he remembered it perfectly.

"Did not the prisoner call at your house that day, within an hour of her receiving the money for you?" questioned Mr. Wharton.

"Yes. But I was out."

John Hatherley was recalled and asked if he had no knowledge of the £50 having been diverted to some other use than the one originally intended. He denied it.

"Did not Miss Freake mention to you that same evening that she had not paid the bill, Smithson being out: and did you not on the following morning authorise your coachman to ask the prisoner for the money?"

"By no means."

"Then if the £50 were applied to some purpose other than the payment of Mr. Smithson's account, you did not know it?"

"Certainly not."

Most of the hearers felt quite disposed to echo John's quiet denial. It seemed so preposterous to suppose even for a moment that he would order his cousin to do one thing with the money and his coachman another. Ridgeley, the coachman in question, was not at hand, and Mary's evidence was next taken.

She had been sitting in the room reserved for witnesses, agitated and sick at heart; her sympathisers attributed it to her distress for her cousin, and to the natural shrinking of a young girl from publicity. In truth she was dominated but by one thought: the terror of betraying herself. The necessity of concealment now had closed upon her like an iron band. She felt that there was no escape from it, and shrank with all the craven doubt of inexperience and stupidity from the thought of the cross-examination and its hundred pitfalls. Mary had at all times resented cleverness, and the cleverness of a lawyer was peculiarly to be dreaded now.

The aspect of the court with all the array of Justice congealed her blood with fear, so that her voice was hardly audible as she took the oath. But the respectful manner of the cross-examining counsel soon restored her self-possession. It seemed a kind of assurance to her that she would not be found out. With calm, returned cunning—

the instinct of self-preservation—she denied knowledge of everything; nobody had been more astonished than herself, when the prisoner was arrested. The lie, once made concrete to her by the telling, was easy to maintain, and the cross-examination of Mr. Wharton availed not to shake her in it. The testimony of John gained additional force when confirmed by the lips of this beautiful and haughty-looking girl.

Evening had drawn on, and the court rose. It was settled that the case should be resumed the next morning at ten o'clock, and Marleyford went home to dinner in a condition of pleased expectation. Nobody had heard the low, anguished moan of the prisoner when she was removed.

Already the torturing hours had left alive in Martha but one sentiment: a longing, distilled to agony, to know the worst and have rest. Anything—she felt, rather than thought—even the solitude of the prison, would be better than this procession of witnesses against her. The familiar, unfamiliarly cruel faces of her accusers had come to have a kind of spectral and altogether unendurable horror for her, and she panted for any catastrophe which should end it all. A kind of stupor fell upon her, but it brought her no relief, for a dull sense of betrayal beat in a surging, ceaseless tide upon her confused brain.

Meanwhile, Mary returned home in the carriage with her brother. Having dressed for dinner and eaten it, and warmed herself comfortably by the splendid fire in her luxurious but sombre drawing-room, she began to feel a little perfunctory remorse.

"John, what about the insanity?" she asked when he joined her. "When will they begin to plead that?"

"Perhaps not at all."

His tone made her angry, for she dimly felt that the only object of his answer was to annoy her. "You know," she exclaimed, "it was only on that understanding that I consented—I mean that I ——"

"That you determined to sacrifice Martha and save yourself?"

Mary sat speechless.

"There is still time for you to confess the truth," continued John coolly.

"If you think it is so easy to tell, why do you not tell it yourself?" flashed out his sister.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose I have still a superstitious reverence for the Hatherley name."

She beat an impatient tattoo with her foot, feeling once again almost capable of rushing off to Mr. Ormerod and confessing everything, just to spite John. What was that abstraction—the family name—to her? Nothing. She thought only of herself. But——what would be the result to herself of her own tardy confession? For the fiftieth time her coward soul sank within her, at the vision of disgrace.

However, if she could not be courageous, she could be feebly

vindictive and indignant. "I should like to know the real truth about Ridgeley and that fifty pounds?" she said.

"You will know soon enough. Ridgeley will be the first witness called to-morrow."

Mary sat looking at her brother—an angry light in her eyes. "You are a fiend!" she burst out at last.

"You are mistaken. I am simply a man who pursues his own ends." John rose as he spoke, and Mary, with a peevish sigh, renounced open revolt, and gave up all thought of penetrating the mystery of Ridgeley.

The trial was resumed on the following day, Ridgeley being first called. He stated that he had been several years in Mr. Hatherley's service as groom, had left, and returned on being promoted to the post of coachman. He knew nothing about the bank notes, spoken of; had never seen them, never handled them or known of their existence, far less had he used them. No denial could be more explicit or complete; nevertheless Mr. Wharton rose with a curious air of suppressed, expectant triumph.

"Did you not come into Miss Freake's sitting-room on the morning in question, and tell her that Mr. John Hatherley had ordered you to ask her for the money, to pay a certain stable account?"

"I did not," answered Ridgeley.

"You did not! Did not the prisoner tell you that she had the exact sum, but that it was destined to pay Smithson; and did not you reply that Mr. John wished the stable account to be paid first?"

"I can remember no such conversation," replied Ridgeley, stonily.

"What! Do you persist in declaring that the prisoner was not induced by these representations to hand over the £50 to you?"

"I never received £50 from her, sir."

"But you constantly did receive as large, and larger, a sum of money from Mr. John Hatherley?"

For the first time a faint hesitation rippled the surface of the witness's dogged calm.

"I used to pay bills for Mr. John," he answered.

"What sort of bills?"

"Bills connected with the stables and the horses."

"Did not Mr. John Hatherley about that time give you £20?—— and £10 a month or two previously? Did he not give you small sums varying from £3 to £5 on several occasions?"

Ridgeley, now obviously somewhat shaken, was inclined towards doubt and forgetfulness at first; but was brought at last to admit that such had been the case.

"For what purpose were these sums given you?"

Apparently Ridgeley had not asked his young master. Mr. John Hatherley was very open-handed.

"Indeed!" ejaculated Mr. Wharton drily. "Did not his open-

handedness in regard to yourself begin six years ago last August, when you accompanied him to a church in the Strand?"

At this there was a decided stir in the audience. They detected a mystery, and for the first time that monument, the Hatherley "legend," slightly trembled on its base. "Were you not a witness to Mr. John Hatherley's secret marriage?" continued Mr. Wharton.

Ridgeley answered "Yes." But his answer was a small matter; lost, as it was, in the tremendous commotion caused by the question.

John Hatherley married? Secretly? Six years ago? In the Strand? Never had there been such a buzz of comment, such a sea of astonished faces. The ushers had some trouble in restoring silence.

Mr. Wharton resumed his interrogations. For the third time John was summoned, and with what inquisitiveness may be easily imagined! But he was quite equal to the occasion. His self-possession was unshaken, only a shimmer of suppressed but profound emotion faintly irradiating the surface of it.

Questioned as to his relations with Ridgeley, he stated that he had known him for years: as a little lad: he had respected the man: that he had frequently made him presents, but that he had never authorised him to obtain from Miss Freake the £50 set aside for Smithson, nor had he any reason to suppose that he had done so. It was quite true that Ridgeley (who was not then in his service) had been one of the two witnesses to his private marriage. Neither would he attempt to deny that he had rewarded the man handsomely for his services, and his silence.

"Are we to conclude that your reasons for keeping your marriage a secret were weighty?"

"They were rendered weighty simply by the peculiar opinions of my father," answered John. "He had an extraordinary shrinking from all persons afflicted by ——." The young man for an instant paused. Only an instant: yet time for a hundred crowding recollections of old Mr. Hatherley's peculiarities to leap into the minds of many people who were present.

"Afflicted by physical infirmity," resumed John, with pain. "And my dear wife is unfortunately deaf and dumb."

His voice rung with a mournful cadence. The revelation was so unexpected and so dramatic, that there was not one of its hearers but felt filled with pity. The pathetic, yet true and purely domestic fact had intrinsically but slight bearing upon the trial: but it brought the general sympathy strongly towards John. Further questioning elicited from him that his wife was now very ill: that this circumstance alone had delayed his introduction of her to his friends since his father's death; but that he had made arrangements for bringing her down to Marleyford the very next week, and that he had not hitherto announced her existence—he really hardly knew *why* he had not done it. It might be from the habit of concealment—it certainly was no longer from the desire of it.

This explanation, vague as it was, gave the impression that John Hatherley knew his own affairs, and was capable of conducting them.

The witnesses, called in Martha's favour, were principally persons who spoke to her respectability and her general good conduct, with others who had known various members of her family and testified to epilepsy in one, eccentricity in another, and to her own remarkable delicacy and abnormal shyness as a young girl. A medical man said he considered her very "strange" now.

Mr. Wharton's appeal for his client was so earnest as to be almost impassioned. He dwelt on Martha's blameless life, on the intimacy in which she had lived with the Hatherleys, and the extreme improbability of her being afraid to confess the loss, even if it had happened, of the sum of £50. Was it not more likely that she in her trusting simplicity had been induced, as she now declared, to hand it over to Ridgeley, though the man, for his own purposes, chose to deny the fact? In regard to the other and principal charge against her, what was more intrinsically likely than the story which she told? Was it not in accordance with all that was known of her that she should have been made the tool of another?—though she shrank from disclosing who that was? Mr. Wharton here made skilful use of the supposed taint of insanity in Martha to explain her dumb, dog-like fidelity, her silence before the magistrates, her concentrated terror of demeanour, and imperfect defence.

But the deftly-woven web of justification fell to shreds beneath the Judge's summing up. For if Martha were indeed a tool, then who had employed her? John? He was the prosecutor. Mary? The idea was preposterous. And had not Mr. Hatherley and his sister and the coachman, one and all, told a perfectly credible and coherent tale? It was for the jury to consider which of the two stories was the most probable: that which represented the prisoner in the light, first of the cat's-paw, and then the victim of an anonymous, invisible friend; or that which showed her as seeking to repair a probable act of carelessness by an offence whose serious consequences had presumably failed to strike her.

The jury took some time to consider their verdict, and on reassembling found the prisoner Guilty; but in consideration of her hitherto unblemished character, recommended her to the mercy of the court. And the Judge, in passing sentence, said that he wished to make it as light as possible, and condemned her to six months' imprisonment.

Asked if she had anything to say, Martha looked up. A nervous trembling that had possessed her for hours suddenly ceased. Her frail little figure straightened itself, and over her pathetic face fell a light as from some vision seen of her alone. She raised her hand with a gesture so solemn that those who watched her were awe-struck and listened breathlessly for her words. Her lips parted: she was about to speak, when suddenly a convulsive shudder shook her frame. She

threw her head back despairingly, cast her wasted arms towards the cruel immensity of the heavens, and with a cry of exceeding sorrow fell forward in a death-like swoon.

"Do you know what she reminded me of?" said a young girl who had turned pale with pity. "One of those pictures of saints, who in the moment of martyrdom see some sign in the skies: and then, when her face altered in that awful way, it was as if the sign had vanished, and nothing was left to her but the reality of her torture."

CHAPTER VI.

CHANGES.

MARLEYFORD was moved to pity on hearing that when she recovered from the long syncope following her condemnation, Martha Freake was undeniably mad. "A condition of strong cerebral excitement," the doctors called it, and she was removed from prison to an asylum.

The next subject of interest that arose was John Hatherley's wife. She arrived with little Mark, her beautiful son of five years old, was introduced by her husband to her future home, and gratified expectation to an unforeseen degree. For she was exquisitely graceful, gentle, refined; and, alas, condemned to die! Consumption told its tale plainly in her wasted form and sunken cheeks. Gliding about the house in these cold spring days, wrapped always in a white fleecy shawl, noiseless, mute, uttering her thoughts but by signs, Mrs. Hatherley was more like a phantom than a living woman.

She had strangely-lovely, shining eyes, with so intense a spirituality in their depths as to awe, while it attracted, almost everybody who came near her. John himself was *truer* in her presence: and the one person whom she seemed rather to fret than to elevate, was Mary. The superiority of this pure nature, veiled by infirmity and illness, irritated the girl's sullen love of ease: in addition to this, she, herself so faultlessly and coldly handsome, had inherited something of her father's dislike to physical defects. Yet Mrs. Hatherley's affliction had nothing in it that should have raised aversion even in the hardest nature, for it was entirely the result of an accident which had happened to her as a child. But what helped to increase Mary's dissatisfied feeling towards her sister-in-law, was the haunting sense of a likeness in her to some face of which she could not distinctly recall the identity. This impression came upon her so strongly at times, that she seemed just on the brink of recollection. And, strangely associated with this vague memory was the idea, equally indefinite, that the resemblance, if it existed, would have some special importance.

One evening, Mrs. Hatherley being better for the first burst of really warm weather, John had invited some friends to dinner. In

the course of the evening he took them all into the library, to show some of his latest book acquisitions. One of the guests, Mr. Ashbury —a stranger in Marleyford, and more interested in pictures than in books—began looking about him, and paused at last before the portrait of an old lady, with grey hair covered by a black coif.

"A fine portrait," he commented. "One of your family, Mr. Hatherley?"

"My grandmother."

"A fine portrait," repeated the connoisseur, "and a fine face. Your grandmother must have been a beauty."

"Her daughter, your aunt, was the handsomest girl I ever saw," suddenly remarked Mr. Wilmot, one of the oldest inhabitants of Marleyford, turning towards John.

A rather awkward silence followed. Everybody knew that about the lady referred to there had been a story: and a clause in Mr. Hatherley's will had lately brought all the circumstances vividly back to people's minds. His sister, Rachel Hatherley, had been the first black sheep of the family. She had eloped with a distant cousin, who bore the same name as herself, but had been a humble dependent in his boyhood on her father's bounty. The young couple had been got off to America, and then Rachel's name had become a dead letter. Her father and brother never forgave her, nor would consent to know anything about her or her numerous children. But John, when quite a young man, had gone to Philadelphia after a defaulting clerk, and there had come across his cousins. The details of his acquaintance with them had never transpired, but apparently he had been more intimate with them than his father liked. For the will, now just proved, under which he inherited, was dated almost immediately after his return to England; and it distinctly provided against his marrying his eldest cousin, Margaret Hatherley. Disobedience on that point was to result in total disinheritance. This condition had recently given the gossips something to talk about, and had surprised even Mary. For she had been a school-girl at the time of John's absence, and the very fact of his acquaintance with his disgraced relatives had been kept secret from her. She had learnt it for the first time when the will was read.

"You have no portrait of your aunt?" resumed old Mr. Wilmot with the obtuse persistence of age.

"A miniature merely," replied Mary. She opened an old bureau and produced the miniature, not without some secret triumphant consciousness of its being like herself.

Mr. Ashbury took it, and gave a little start of surprise.

"Where have I seen the original?" he exclaimed. "Let me think! Yes. . . . No. . . . I have it. It was in America, twenty-five years or more ago. A beautiful young woman, the wife I think ——" he paused and glanced hesitatingly, not liking to complete his sentence.

"The wife of a bookseller," blundered old Mr. Wilmot eagerly. "To be sure; that was she."

"This is very like you, Miss Hatherley," continued Mr. Ashbury, his eyes still fixed upon the miniature. "It is remarkable how the family type has clung to you all." His eyes reverted to the portrait of the grandmother: then to Mrs. John Hatherley seated in a high-backed chair beneath it. She was unheeding, because unhearing, of what was said around her. Her lovely eyes were fixed in reverie, her hands lay folded tightly on her lap. Over her head, to protect herself from the draught of an open window, she had drawn a black lace scarf. "There is a strong family likeness between you and your brother and *all* these portraits. I declare," he added laughing, "even Mrs. Hatherley has at this moment a likeness to your grandmother."

Mary gave a great start—a start so unmistakable that Mr. Ashbury almost dropped the miniature in surprise. John, who had apparently not been listening, crossed the room at this moment and spelt out on his fingers a warning to his wife that she was sitting too long by the open window. "We will go back to the drawing-room," he said addressing his guests, and drew his wife's hand within his arm.

"Tell me," cried Mary suddenly, with extraordinary eagerness, to Mr. Ashbury, "Did you know much of my aunt in America? Had she many children? Did you see them?"

John had drawn aside to let the party defile in front of him. "Mr. Ashbury," he said, addressing that gentleman with a courteous wave of his hand towards the door.

"She had only one child when I knew her, I *think*," Mr. Ashbury was saying in answer to Mary. "Let me see? . . . . What did I hear afterwards about the child? a charming little girl, I remember. It died, it seems to me, in some odd, terrible way. Or was it only ——?" He paused, musing.

"Some strange accident?" suggested Mary, white to the lips.

But evidently Mr. Ashbury's memory for faces was very superior to his recollection of facts. "I don't remember," he replied shaking his head, and aware of John's smiling summons he at last obeyed it.

Mary tried to resume the subject later in the evening, but he evidently did not like to be cross-questioned. He only became more vague the more she interrogated him; and the wild possibility which had presented itself and turned her faint with the rush of attendant thoughts, receded every moment into a dimmer and more distant background.

Nevertheless, she could not sleep all night, but tossed restlessly from side to side. And in the morning, when John had left the house, she presented herself in her sister's dressing-room. Mrs. Hatherley received her with her usual gentle sweetness of look and manner.

With characteristic apathy and selfishness, Mary had given herself very little trouble to master any means of communication with the dumb woman. She could speak a very little, slowly and laboriously,

on her fingers; and eagerness made the task easier for her now than in general. Only she questioned in a clumsy, blunt way, not as she would have questioned a person who could speak.

"Are you sure that your father's name was Lyndon?"

"Of course," Mrs. Hatherley signified in reply, with eviden astonishment.

"And you always lived in London?"

"Always, after he came home."

"Home? From what place?" Mary's heart began beating again.

"From Jamaica."

"Were you there with him?"

"Yes."

"And how old were you when you came away?"

"A little older than Mark here," and Mrs. Hatherley laid her hand tenderly on her little son's curly head.

Mary gave a sigh of disappointment, as she fixed her eyes, full of a fierce curiosity, on the pure, lovely face before her. Was she prevaricating to her, this wife of John's? The idea was too preposterously insulting even for her to accept it. She had nothing more to ask, yet would have begun to question again. But Mrs. Hatherley was very unwell that morning, and she lay back on her pillowed chair so motionless from weakness as to seem asleep. Mary had no choice but to leave her.

She spoke about it to Ralph Mercer; but he condemned it as fantastic; a foolish, visionary idea.

"You never heard that one of your aunt's children was deaf and dumb?" he said: and Mary was fain to confess that she had not.

"One might set a detective to work, if one had money," mused Ralph. "Not that it's likely to be true. Without money, hang it! one cannot do anything—and you never have a spare sixpence, Mary."

"That is not my fault," answered Mary, with rather resentful significance.

John made her a very large allowance for pocket-money, but Ralph Mercer borrowed the greater part of it. His engagement to Mary was no longer opposed by John, and, except when mysterious errands took Ralph to London, he was for ever at Hatherley House. People began to talk a little, to shake their heads too, to wonder what the beautiful Mary *could* see in him to love. Truth to say, it was a question which Mary once or twice of late had asked herself. Her obstinacy appeased by the withdrawal of opposition, Ralph lost a great part of his charm in her eyes. Moreover, his doubtful life in London during the year of separation, had left an ineffaceable trace. In air manner, and speech he was distinctly more dissipated than of old. His good looks, once very marked, were obscured, and with his free-and-easy ways, and his eternal debts, he was about as unattractive a wooer as could well be imagined.

And in constant contrast with him was Walter Russell: so refined, so gentle and clever: unswerving also in his affection, and now the presumptive heir to his uncle's baronetcy.

Given these two sets of opposing forces, with nothing but Mary's fast-fading inclinations to strike the balance in favour of Ralph, and one can easily imagine the result. The day arrived when his need of money became insupportable; when not ruin alone threatened him, but ruin accompanied by disgrace; and Mary engaged herself to Walter Russell. This took place within six months after Mr. Hatherley's death: but Lady Russell, writing from Karlsbad, while offering her warm, delighted congratulations, urged that the marriage should take place immediately. "Sir Charles was already so much better," she wrote, "that the doctors really began to entertain hopes of his ultimate recovery. And it would give both him and herself so much pleasure to welcome the young couple on their return from the honeymoon, at Russell Hall. If your dear uncle continues to improve so rapidly," wound up her ladyship, "I shall feel as if I were returning with him from a honeymoon myself, for he looks ten years younger and the change in him is altogether miraculous."

"What delightful news!" exclaimed Walter Russell.

"Delightful," echoed Mary, slowly. "I suppose, Walter, that your aunt will herself present me in the spring."

Walter was sure that she would do that or anything else that could bring pleasure to his love. It was curious how devotedly he loved Mary: he as clever as she was stupid; as true as she was false; as brave as she was cowardly! Her stately beauty and composed manner, the grace that resulted in her firm and perfect physical harmony, to his enchanted eyes were warrant sufficient for crediting her with a shining human soul. He was one of those men who do not care for any superfluous endowment of brains in a wife, but are content that she should be "womanly," having no very definite idea of what they mean by that elastic term. The wedding-day was fixed; and in the preparation of her trousseau, the reception of her presents, and the congratulations of her friends, Mary was nearly happy.

"Do you know," said John one morning to his sister, looking up from the perusal of a letter, "Martha is well again—is cured?"

"Cured?" Mary stared blankly. What would be the consequences to herself?

"So far cured," continued John, "that the doctors at the asylum consider they can no longer keep her shut up. But they recommend absolute quiet and freedom from anxiety."

"And the prison authorities—her sentence?" demanded Mary.

"The time of her sentence has just expired."

"And what do you mean to do? Is she to be allowed to come out?" Mary asked the question in quite an indignant tone. For after all Martha had been mad; she would probably become so again.

"I am afraid I cannot persuade the asylum to keep her," replied

John, with one of his quiet, covert sneers. "Don't alarm yourself, Mary. Nobody would believe her story now. You are quite safe."

"I suppose you have yourself to think of, as well as me," exclaimed his sister angrily. That was one of the things that most exasperated her about John—his cool assumption always that the only peril of exposure was hers. After all, he was as criminal as she; he had known it was she who was guilty, and not Martha. If only John would be kinder to her! But nobody ever was kind, except Walter—for whom, in her secret soul, she had some slight contempt. There was, however, consolation in the thought that she should reign as a queen when she became Lady Russell.

The marriage-day dawned at last, a splendid morning. The parish church of Marleyford, between guests and spectators, was full to suffocation. Rarely had so grand a wedding been seen there. Between the number of the bridesmaids, the splendour of the dresses, the full choral service and the three officiating clergymen, it was enough to make the dead generations of Hatherleys rise from their graves, in protest at such oblivion of their stately sobriety.

But Mary had willed it so, being one of those women who would hardly think themselves married at all without the orange-flowers, Brussels lace, and wedding-cake, about which they have dreamed for years. She had gone about her preparations with an almost religious solemnity, and carefully studied all the most fashionable novelties. One of the results had been to make little Mark her train-bearer, and dress him up in a costume of the time of Louis XV.

The service was over, and the bride and bridegroom had paced down the aisle to the spirit-stirring strains of the "Wedding March." Mary stepped into the carriage and proceeded to release her train from the hands of little Mark with all the reverential regard due to so many yards of magnificent texture. Walter stood smiling down at the child and looking happy and handsome in the sunlight.

The bridesmaids, one shimmering, fluffy, airy, radiant confusion of lace and swansdown and bouquets and pretty faces, were grouped in the porch; behind them were crowded ladies in satin and velvets, old gentlemen with bald heads and rubicund faces, young men in glossy coats and lavender ties, with favours in their button-holes.

Suddenly, through the crowd of gaping rustics, a shabby, trembling, tiny figure made its way.

"Good-bye, Mary," it cried; "I wish you joy." And the bride fell back in her carriage with a shriek of absolute terror, as she recognised the face of Martha Freake.

The unexpected apparition caused no small consternation. Several young ladies fairly echoed Mary's scream; and John, hastily dropping from his arm the hand of the frightened Mrs. Ormerod, hurried towards the intruder with an air of dignified determination.

"Pray do not look so alarmed; I mean no harm to anyone," said Martha. "I only came down from London to fetch my things. I did

not know it was Mary's wedding-day." She stood, turning her head from side to side as she spoke, with a kind of childish curiosity.

"How can this be permitted!" exclaimed John, for once so taken aback that he hardly knew what to say.

"Oh, let me go!" wailed the bride from her carriage. "Walter, send her away. She is mad. I am frightened. Why will people be so unkind?" Her voice broke into a sob, and she burst out crying.

"She is not mad, sir; only a little flighty-like and queer," said a respectable woman who now addressed John. "She has been staying with Mrs. Parsons, in London, since she was released; but she would come down to-day to fetch her own things from your house. Sometimes she seems half to forget what has happened."

Still turning her head about in bird-like fashion, and without appearing to notice what was said, Martha scanned the groups around her. All at once her face changed. A shadow darkened it; her head fell. She put her hand up to her temple with a gesture of suffering.

"Let me go," she said. "There is too much noise here."

"Lawks, ma'am! nobody is speaking," said her companion, pityingly.

"Too much noise. Too much noise," repeated Martha, and turned away.

"She often says strange things, with no sense in them, sir," resumed the woman to John. "But she is quite quiet, and more manageable than a babe."

The crowd shrank away, and Martha passed quickly out of sight. In the afternoon, when the wedding-breakfast was quite over, the same woman came to Hatherley Hall to fetch her things. Miss Freake would not come herself, she told John, although at first she had been so keen to do it. On their getting back to the inn, she had lain down at once and gone to sleep. She often did that after anything had seemed to trouble her, and was always restored by it.

John, however, wrote to the lunatic asylum protesting against his cousin's release, saying that he had seen her, and that she seemed anything but cured. In answer, he was told that Miss Freake on quitting the asylum was as sane as himself.

John thereupon journeyed up to London and saw Mr. and Mrs. Parsons, to whom Martha had returned. But Martha had already departed for Paris, and had insisted upon going alone. She was a little odd in manner at times, they added, and occasionally did eccentric things. But she had no delusions and was never violent.

John Hatherley obtained Martha's address in Paris, and wrote to her, offering her a substantial monthly allowance. He received in reply a curt refusal, so little like the letter of a lunatic that he felt disposed, after reading it, to attribute Martha's appearance and behaviour on Mary's wedding-day rather to a spirit of revenge than to insanity.

(To be continued.)

THE EBONY BOX.

THE sun shone brightly on Foregate Street but did not yet touch the front windows on Lawyer Cockermuth's side of it. Miss Betty Cockermuth sat near one of them in the parlour, spectacles on nose, and hard at work unpicking the braid off some very old woollen curtains, green once, but now faded to a sort of dingy brown. It was Wednesday morning, the day following the wonderful event of finding the box, lost so long, full of its golden guineas. In truth nobody thought of it as anything less than marvellous.

The house-cleaning, in preparation for Easter and Easter's visitors, was in full flow to-day, and would be for more than a week to come; the two maids were hard at it above. Ward, who did not disdain to labour with his own hands, was at the house, busy at some mysterious business in the brewhouse, coat off, shirt-sleeves stripped up to elbow, plunging at that moment something or other into the boiling water of the furnace.

"How I could have let them remain up so long in this state, I can't think," said Miss Betty to herself, arresting her employment, scissors in hand, to regard the dreary curtains. She had drawn the table towards her from the middle of the room, and the heavy work was upon it. Susan came in to impart some domestic news.

"Ward says there's a rare talk in the town about the finding of that box, missis," cried she, when she had concluded it.—"My! how bad them curtains look, now they're down!"

Servants were on more familiar terms with their mistresses in those days without meaning, or showing, any disrespect; identifying themselves, as it were, with the family and its interests. Susan, a plump, red-cheeked young woman turned thirty, had been housemaid in her present place for seven years. She had promised a baker's headman to marry him, but never could be got to fix the day. In winter she'd say to him wait till summer; and when summer came, she'd say wait till winter. Miss Betty commended her prudence.

"Yes," said she now, in answer to the girl, "I've been wondering how we could have kept them up so long; they are not fit for much, I'm afraid, save the rag-bag. Chintz will make the room look much nicer."

As Susan left the parlour, Captain Cockermuth entered it, a farmer with him who had come in from Hallow to the Wednesday's market. The Captain's delighted excitement at the finding of the box had not at all subsided; he had dreamt of it, he talked of it, he pinned every acquaintance he could pick up this morning and brought him in to see the box of gold. Independently of its being a very great satisfaction to have had the old mysterious loss cleared up, the sixty guineas would be a huge boon to the Captain's pocket.

"But how was it that none of you ever found it, if it remained all this while in the pigeon-hole?" cried the wondering farmer, bending over the little round box of guineas, which the Captain placed upon the table open, the lid by its side.

"Well, we didn't find it, that's all I know; or poor Philip, either," said Captain Cockermuth.

The farmer took his departure. As the Captain was showing him to the front-door, another gentleman came bustling in. It was Thomas Chance the lawyer, father of the young man who had been the previous night with Samson Dene. He and Lawyer Cockermuth were engaged together just then in some complicated, private, and very disagreeable business, each acting for a separate client, who were the defendants against a great wrong—or what they thought was one.

"Come in, Chance, and take a look at my box of guineas, resuscitated from the grave," cried the Captain, joyously. "You can go into the office to John afterwards."

"Well, I've hardly time this morning," answered Mr. Chance, turning, though, into the parlour and shaking hands with Miss Betty. "Austin told me it was found."

Now it happened that Lawyer Cockermuth came then into the parlour himself, to get something from his private desk-table which stood there. When the box had been discussed, Mr. Chance took a letter from his pocket and placed it in his brother practitioner's hands.

"What do you think of that?" he asked. "I got it by post this morning."

"Think! why that it is of vital importance," said Mr. Cockermuth when he had read it.

"Yes; no doubt of that. But what is to be our next move in answer to it?" asked the other.

Seeing they were plunging into business, the Captain strolled away to the front door, which stood open all day, for the convenience of those coming to the office, and remained there whistling, his hands in his pockets, on the look out for somebody else to bring in. He had put the lid on the box of guineas and left the box on the table.

"I should like to take a copy of this letter," said Mr. Cockermuth to the other lawyer.

"Well, you can take it," answered Chance. "Mind who does it, though—Parslet, or somebody else that's confidential. Don't let it go into the office."

"You are wanted, sir," said Mr. Dene, from the door.

"Who is it?" asked his master.

"Mr. Chamberlain. He says he is in a hurry."

"I'm coming. Here, Dene!" he called out as the latter was turning away: and young Dene came back again.

"Sit down here, now, and take a copy of this letter," cried the lawyer, rapidly drawing out and opening the little writing-desk table

that stood against the wall at the back of the room. "Here's pen, ink and paper, all ready: the letter is confidential, you perceive."

He went out of the room as he spoke, Mr. Chance with him; and Sam Dene sat down to commence his task, after exchanging a few words with Miss Betty, with whom he was on good terms.

"Charles makes as much fuss over this little box as if it were filled with diamonds from Golconda, instead of guineas," remarked she, pointing with her scissors to the box, which stood near her on the table, to direct the young man's attention to it. "I don't know how many folks he has not brought in already to have a look at it."

"Well, it was a capital find, Miss Betty; one to be proud of," answered Sam, settling to his work.

For some little time nothing was heard but the scratching of Mr. Dene's pen and the clicking of Miss Betty's scissors. Her task was nearing completion. A few minutes more, and the last click was given, the last bit of the braid was off. "And I'm glad of it," cried she aloud, flinging the end of the curtain on the top of the rest.

"This braid will do again for something or other," considered Miss Betty, as she began to wind it upon an old book. "It was put on fresh only three or four years ago. Well brushed, it will look almost like new."

Again Susan opened the door. "Miss Betty, here's the man come with the chintz: five or six rolls of it for you to choose from," cried she. "Shall he come in here?"

Miss Betty was about to say yes, but stopped and said no, instead. The commotion of holding up the chintzes to the light, to judge of their different merits, might disturb Mr. Dene; and she knew better than to interrupt business.

"Let him take them to the room where they are to hang, Susan; we can judge best there."

Tossing the braid to Susan, who stood waiting at the door, Miss Betty hastily took up her curtains, and Susan held the door open for her mistress to pass through.

Choosing chintz for window-curtains takes some time; as everybody knows whose fancy is erratic. And how long Miss Betty and Susan and the young man from the chintz-mart had been doubting and deciding and doubting again, did not quite appear, when Captain Cockermuth's voice was heard ascending from below.

"Betty! Are you upstairs, Betty?"

"Yes, I'm here," she called back, crossing to the door to speak. "Do you want me, Charles?"

"Where have you put the box?"

"What box?"

"The box of guineas."

"It is on the table."

"It is not on the table. I can't see it anywhere."

"It was on the table when I left the parlour. I did not touch it. Ask Mr Dene where it is: I left him there."

"Mr. Dene's not here. I wish you'd come down."

"Very well; I'll come in a minute or two," concluded Miss Betty, going back to the chintzes.

"Why, I saw that box on the table as I shut the door after you had come out, ma'am," observed Susan, who had listened to the colloquy.

"So did I," said Miss Betty; "it was the very last thing my eyes fell on. If young Mr. Dene finished what he was about and left the parlour, I dare say he put the box up somewhere for safety. I think, Susan, we must fix upon this light pea-green with the rosebuds running up it. It matches the paper: and the light coming through it takes quite a nice shade."

A little more indecision yet; and yet a little more, as to whether the curtains should be lined, or not, and then Miss Cockermuth went down stairs. The Captain was pacing the passage to and fro impatiently.

"Now then, Betty, where's my box?"

"But how am I to know where the box is, Charles, if it's not on the table?" she remonstrated, turning into the parlour, where two friends of the Captain's waited to be regaled with the sight of the recovered treasure. "I had to go upstairs with the young man who brought the chintzes; and I left the box here"—indicating the exact spot on the table. "It was where you left it yourself. I did not touch it at all."

She shook hands with the visitors. Captain Cockermuth looked gloomy—as if he were at sea and had lost his reckoning.

"If you had to leave the room why didn't you put the box up?" asked he. "A boxful of guineas shouldn't be left alone in an empty room."

"But Mr. Dene was in the room; he sat at the desk there, copying a letter for John. As to why didn't I put the box up, it was not my place to do so that I know of. You were about yourself, Charles—only at the front door, I suppose."

Captain Cockermuth was aware that he had not been entirely at the front door. Two or three times he had crossed over to hold a chat with acquaintances on the other side the way; had strolled with one of them nearly up to Salt Lane and back. Upon catching hold of these two gentlemen, now brought in, he had found the parlour empty of occupants and the box not to be seen.

"Well, this is a nice thing—that a man can't put his hand upon his own property when he wants to, or hear where it is!" grumbled he. "And what business on earth had Dene to meddle with the box?"

"To put it in safety—if he did meddle with it, and a sensible thing to do," retorted Miss Betty, who did not like to be scolded unjustly. "Just like you, Charles, making a fuss over nothing! Why don't you go and ask young Dene where it is?"

"Young Dene is not in. And John's not in. Nobody is in but Parslet; and he does not know anything about it. I must say, Betty, you manage the house nicely!" concluded the Captain ironically, giving way to his temper.

This was, perhaps the reader may think, commotion enough "over nothing," as Miss Betty put it. But it was not much as compared with the commotion which set in later. When Mr. Cockermuth came in, he denied all knowledge of it, and Sam Dene was impatiently waited for.

It was past two o'clock when he returned, for he had been home to dinner. The good-looking young fellow turned in at the front door with a fleet step, and encountered Captain Cockermuth, who attacked him hotly, demanding what he had done with the box.

"Ah," said Sam, lightly and coolly, "Parslet said you were looking for it." Mr. Parslet had in fact mentioned it at home over his dinner.

"Well, where is it?" said the Captain. "Where did you put it?"

"I?" cried young Dene. "Not anywhere. Should I be likely to touch the box, sir? I saw the box on that table while I was copying a letter for Mr. Cockermuth; that's all I know of it."

The Captain turned red, and pale, and red again. "Do you mean to tell me to my face, Mr. Dene, that the box is *gone?*"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Sam in the easiest of all easy tones. "It seems to be gone."

The box was gone. Gone once more with all its golden guineas. It could not be found anywhere; in the house or out of the house, upstairs or down. The Captain searched frantically, the others helped him, but no trace of it could be found.

At first it was impossible to believe it. That this self-same box should mysteriously have vanished a second time, seemed to be too marvellous for fact. But it was true.

Nobody would admit a share in the responsibility. The Captain left the box safe amid (as he put it) a roomful of people: Miss Betty considered that she left it equally safe, with Mr. Dene seated at the writing-table, and the Captain dodging (as *she* put it) in and out. Mr. Cockermuth had not entered the parlour since he left it, when called to Mr. Chamberlain, with whom he had gone out. Sam Dene reiterated that he had not meddled with the box; no, nor thought about it.

Sam's account, briefly given, was this. After finishing copying the letter, he closed the little table-desk and pushed it back to its place against the wall, and had carried the letter and the copy into the office. Finding Mr. Cockermuth was not there, he locked them up in his own desk, having to go to the Guildhall upon some business. The business there took up some time, in fact until past one o'clock, and he then went home to dinner.

"And did you consider it right, Sam Dene, to leave a valuable box

like that on the table, unguarded?" demanded Captain Cockermuth, as they all stood together in the parlour, after questioning Sam; and the Captain had been looking so fierce and speaking so sharply that it might be thought he was taking Sam for the thief, off-hand.

"To tell the truth, Captain, I never thought of the box," answered Sam. "I might not have noticed that the box was in the room at all but for Miss Betty's drawing my attention to it. After that, I grew so much interested in the letter I was copying (for I know all about the cause, as Mr. Cockermuth is aware, and it was curious news) that I forgot everything else."

Lawyer Cockermuth nodded to confirm this. The Captain went on.

"Betty drew your attention to it, did she? Why did she draw it? In what way?"

"Well, she remarked that you made as much fuss over that box as if it were filled with diamonds," replied the young man, glad to pay out the Captain for his angry and dictatorial tone. But the Captain was in truth beginning to entertain a very ominous suspicion.

"Do you wish to deny, Samson Dene, that my sister Betty left that box on the table when she quitted the room?"

"Why, who does?" cried Sam. "When Miss Betty says she left the box on the table, of course she did leave it. She must know. Susan, it seems, also saw that it was left there."

"And you could see that box of guineas standing stark staring on the table, and come out of the room and leave it to its fate!" foamed the Captain. "Instead of giving me a call to say nobody was on guard here!"

"I didn't see it," returned Sam. "There's no doubt it was there, but I did not see it. I never looked towards the table as I came out, that I know of. The table, as I dare say you remember, was not in its usual place; it was up there by the window. The box had gone clean out of my thoughts."

"Well, Mr. Dene, my impression is *that you have got the box*," cried the angry Captain.

"Oh, is it!" returned Sam, with supreme good humour, and just the least suspicion of a laugh. "A box like that would be uncommonly useful to me."

"I expect, young man, the guineas would!"

"Right you are, Captain."

But Captain Cockermuth regarded this mocking pleasantry as particularly ill-timed. *He believed the young man was putting it on to divert suspicion from himself.*

"Who did take the box?" questioned he. "Tell me that."

"I wish I could, sir."

"How could the box vanish off the table unless it was taken, I ask you?"

"That's a puzzling question," coolly rejoined Sam. "It was too heavy for the rats, I expect."

"Oh, dear, but we have no rats in the house," cried out Miss Betty. "I wish we had, I'm sure—and could find the box in their holes." She was feeling tolerably uncomfortable. Placid and easy in a general way, serious worry always upset her considerably.

Captain Cockermuth's suspicions were becoming certainties. The previous night, when his brother had been telling him various items of news of the old town, as they sat confidentially over the fire after Miss Betty had gone up to bed, Mr. Cockermuth chanced to mention the fact that young Dene had been making a few debts. Not speaking in any ill-natured spirit, quite the contrary, for he liked the young man amazingly. Only a few, he continued, thoughtless young men would do so; and he had given him a lecture. And then he laughingly added the information that Mr. Jacobson had imparted to him twelve months ago, in their mutual friendship—of the debts Sam had made in London.

No sensible person can be surprised that Charles Cockermuth recalled this now. It rankled in his mind. Had Sam Dene taken the box of guineas to satisfy these debts contracted during the past year at Worcester? It looked like it. And the longer the Captain dwelt on it, the more and more likely it grew to look.

All the afternoon the search was kept up by the Captain. Not an individual article in the parlour but was turned inside out; he wanted to have the carpet up. His brother and Sam Dene had returned to their work in the office as usual. The Captain was getting to feel like a raging bear; three times Miss Betty had to stop him in a dreadful fit of swearing; and when dinner time came he could not eat. It was a beautiful slice of Severn salmon, which had its price, I can tell you, in Worcester then, and minced veal, and a jam tart, all of which dishes Charles Cockermuth especially favoured. But the loss of the sixty guineas did away with his appetite. Mr. Cockermuth, who took the loss very coolly, laughed at him.

The laughing did not mend the Captain's temper: neither did the hearing that Sam Dene had departed for home as usual at five o'clock. Had Sam been innocent, he would at least have come to the parlour and inquired whether the box was found, instead of sneaking off home to tea.

Fretting and fuming, raging and stamping, disturbing the parlour's peace and his own, strode Charles Cockermuth. His good-humoured brother John bore it for an hour or two, and then told him he might as well go outside and stamp on the pavement for a bit.

"I will," said Charles. Catching up his hat, saying nothing to anybody, he strode off to see the sergeant of police—Dutton—and laid the case concisely before him: The box of guineas was on the table where his sister sat at work; her work being at one end, the box at the other. Sam Dene was also in the room, copying a letter at the writing-table. Miss Betty was called upstairs; she went, leaving the box on the table. It was the last thing she saw as she left the

room; the servant, who had come to call her, also saw it standing there. Presently young Dene also left the room and the house; and from that moment the box was never seen.

"What do you make of that, Mr. Dutton?" summed-up Captain Cockermuth.

"Am I to understand that no other person entered the room after Mr. Dene quitted it?" inquired the Sergeant.

"Not a soul. I can testify to that myself."

"Then it looks as though Mr. Dene must have taken the box."

"Just so," assented the complainant, triumphantly. "And I shall give him into custody for stealing it."

Mr. Dutton considered. His judgment was cool; the Captain's hot. He thought there might be ins and outs in this affair that had not yet come to the surface. Besides that, he knew young Dene, and did not much fancy him the sort of individual likely to do a thing of this kind.

"Captain Cockermuth," said he, "I think it might be best for me to come up to the house and see a bit into the matter personally, before proceeding to extreme measures. We experienced officers have a way of turning up scraps of evidence that other people would never look at. Perhaps, after all, the box is only mislaid."

"But I tell you it's *lost*," said the Captain. "Clean gone. Can't be found high or low."

"Well, if that same black box is lost again, I can only say it is the oddest case I ever heard of. One would think the box had got a demon inside it."

"No, Sergeant, you are wrong there. The demon's inside him that took it. Listen while I whisper something in your ear—that young Dene is over head and ears in debt: he has debts here, debts there, debts everywhere. For some little time now, as I chance to know, he has been at his very wits' end to think where or how he could pick up some money to satisfy the most pressing; fit to die of fear, lest they should travel to the knowledge of his uncle at Elm Farm."

"*Is* it so!" exclaimed Mr. Dutton, severely. And his face changed, and his opinion also. "Are you sure of this, sir?"

"Well, my informant was my brother; so you may judge whether it is likely to be correct or not," said the Captain. "But, if you think it best to make some inquiries at the house, come with me now and do so."

They walked to Foregate together. The Sergeant looked a little at the features of the parlour, where the loss had taken place, and heard what Miss Betty had to say, and questioned Susan. This did not help the suspicion thrown on Sam Dene, save in one point—their joint testimony that he and the box were left alone in the room together.

Mr. Cockermuth had gone out, so the Sergeant did not see him:

but, as he was not within doors when the loss occurred, he could not have aided the investigation in any way.

"Well, Dutton, what do you think now?" asked Captain Cockermuth, strolling down the street with the Sergeant when he departed.

"I confess my visit has not helped me much," said Dutton, a slow-speaking man, given to be cautious. "If nobody entered the room between the time when Miss Cockermuth left it and you entered it, why then, sir, there's only young Dene to fall back upon."

"I tell you nobody did enter it," cried the choleric Captain; "or *could*, without my seeing them. I stood at the front door. Ward was busy at the house that morning, dodging perpetually across the top of the passage, between the kitchen and brewhouse: he, too, is sure no stranger could have come in without being seen by him."

"Did you see young Dene leave the room, sir?"

"I did. Hearing somebody come out of the parlour, I looked round and saw it was young Dene with some papers in his hand. He went into the office for a minute or two, and then passed me, remarking, with all the impudence in life, that he was going to the town hall. He must have had my box in his pocket then."

"A pity but you had gone into the parlour at once, Captain," remarked the Sergeant. "If only to put the box in safety—provided it was there."

"But I thought it was safe. I thought my sister was there. I did go in almost directly."

"And you never stirred from the door—from first to last?"

"I don't say that. When I first stood there I strolled about a little, talking with one person and another. *But I did not stir from the door after I saw Sam Dene leave the parlour.* And I do not think five minutes elapsed before I went in. Not more than five, I am quite certain. What are you thinking about, Dutton?—you don't seem to take me."

"I take you well enough, sir, and all you say. But what is puzzling me in the matter is this; strikes me as strange, in fact: that Mr. Dene should do the thing (allowing that he has done it) in so open and barefaced a manner, laying himself open to immediate suspicion. Left alone in the room with the box by Miss Betty, he must know that if, when he left it, the box vanished with him, only one inference would be drawn. Most thieves exercise some caution."

"Not when they are as hard up as Dene is. Impudence with them is the order of the day, and often carries luck with it. Nothing risk, nothing win, they cry, and they *do* risk—and win. Dene has got my box, Sergeant."

"Well, sir, it looks dark against him; almost *too* dark; and if you decide to give him into custody, of course we have only to——Good evening, Badger!"

They had strolled as far as the Cross, and were standing on the wide pavement in front of St. Nicholas' church, about to part, when

that respectable gentleman, Jonas Badger, passed by. A thought struck the Captain. He knew the man was a money-lender in a private way.

"Here, Badger, stop a minute," he hastily cried. "I want to ask you a question about young Dene—my brother's clerk, you know. Does he owe you money?—Much?"

Mr. Badger, wary by nature and by habit, glanced first at the questioner and then at the police sergeant, and did not answer. Whereupon Captain Cockermuth, as an excuse for his curiosity, plunged into the history of what had occurred: the finding of the box of guineas yesterday and the losing it again to-day, and the doubt of Sam.

Mr. Badger listened with interest; for the news of that marvellous find had not yet reached his ears. He had been shut up in his office all the morning, very busy over his account books; and in the afternoon had walked over to Kempsey, where he had a client or two, getting back only in time for tea.

"That long-lost box of guineas come to light at last!" he exclaimed. "What an extraordinary thing! And Mr. Dene is suspected of—Why, good gracious!" he broke off in fresh astonishment, "I have just seen him with a guinea in his pocket!"

"Seen a guinea in Sam Dene's pocket!" cried Captain Cockermuth, turning yellow as the flame of the gas-lamp under which they were standing.

"Why yes, I have. It was ——"

But there Mr. Badger came to a full stop. It had suddenly struck him that he might be doing harm to Sam Dene; and the rule of his life was not to harm anybody, or to make an enemy, if his own interest allowed him to avoid it.

"I won't say any more, Captain Cockermuth. It is no business of mine."

But here Mr. Sergeant Dutton came to the fore. "You must, Badger. You must say all you know that bears upon the affair; the law demands it of you. What about the guinea?"

"Well, if you force me to do so—putting it in that way," returned the man, driven into a corner.

Mr. Badger had just been down to Edgar Street to pay another visit to Sam. Not to torment him; he did not do that more than he could help; but simply to say he would accept smaller instalments for the liquidation of his debt—which of course meant giving to Sam a longer time to pay the whole in. This evening he was admitted to Sam's sitting-room. During their short conversation, Sam, searching impatiently for a pencil in his waistcoat pocket, drew out with it a few coins in silver money, and one coin in gold. Mr. Badger's hungry eyes saw that it was an old guinea. These particulars he now imparted.

"What did he *say* about the guinea?" cried Captain Cockermuth, his own eyes glaring.

"Not a word," said Badger; "neither did I. He slipped it back into his pocket."

"I hope you think there's some proof to go upon *now*," were Charles Cockermuth's last words to the police officer as he wished him good night.

On the following morning, Sam Dene was apprehended, and taken before the magistrates. Beyond being formally charged, very little was done; Miss Betty was in bed with a sick headache, brought on by the worry, and could not appear to give evidence; so he was remanded on bail until Saturday.

II.

I'm sure you might have thought all his, rick-yards were on fire by the way old Jacobson came bursting in. It was Saturday morning, and we were at breakfast at Dyke Manor. He had run every step of the way from Elm Farm, two miles nearly, not having patience to wait for his gig, and came in all excitement, the *Worcester Herald* in his hand. The Squire started from his chair; Mrs. Todhetly, then in the act of pouring out a cup of coffee, let it flow over on to the tablecloth.

"What on earth's amiss, Jacobson?" cried the Squire.

"Ay, what's amiss," stuttered Jacobson in answer; "*this* is amiss," holding out the newspaper. "I'll prosecute the Editor as sure as I'm a living man. It is a conspiracy got up to sell it; a concocted lie. It can't be anything else, you know, Todhetly. And I want you to go off with me to Worcester. The gig's following me."

When we had somewhat collected our senses, and could look at the newspaper, there was the account as large as life. Samson Reginald Dene had been had up before the magistrates on Thursday morning on a charge of stealing a small box of carved ebony, containing sixty guineas in gold, from the dwelling house of Lawyer Cockermuth; and he was to be brought up again that day, Saturday, for examination.

"A pretty thing this is to see, when a man opens his weekly newspaper at his breakfast table!" gasped Jacobson, flicking the report with his angry finger. "I'll have the law of them—accusing *my* nephew of such a thing as that! You'll go with me, Squire!"

"Go! of course I'll go!" returned the Squire, in his hot partisanship. "We were going to Worcester, any way; I've things to do there. Poor Sam! Hanging would be too good for the printers of that newspaper, Jacobson."

Mr. Jacobson's gig was heard driving up to the gate at railroad speed; and soon our own carriage was ready. Old Jacobson sat with the Squire, I behind with Giles; the other groom, Blossom, drove Tod in the gig; and away we went in the blustering March wind. Many people, farmers and others, were on the road, riding or driving to Worcester market.

Well, we found it was true. And not the mistake of the newspapers:

they had but reported what passed before the magistrates at the town hall.

The first person we saw was Miss Cockermuth. She was in a fine way, not knowing what to think or believe, and sat in the parlour in that soft green gown of twilled silk (that might have been a relic of the silk made in the time of the Queen of Sheba), her cap and front all awry. Rumour said old Jacobson had been a sweetheart of hers in their young days; but I'm sure I don't know. Any way they were very friendly with one another, and she sometimes called him "Frederick." He sat down by her on the horsehair sofa, and we took chairs.

She recounted the circumstances (ramblingly) from beginning to end. Not that the end was come yet by a long way. And—there it was, she wound up, when the narrative was over: the box had disappeared, just for all the world as mysteriously as it disappeared in the days gone by.

Mr. Jacobson had listened patiently. He was a fine upright man, with a healthy colour and bright dark eyes. He wore a blue frock coat to-day with metal buttons, and top-boots. As yet he did not see how they had got up grounds for accusing Sam, and he said so.

"To be sure," cried the Squire. "How's that, Miss Betty?"

"Why, it's this way," said Miss Betty—"that nobody was here in the parlour but Sam when the box vanished. It is my brother Charles who has done it all; he is so passionate, you know. John has properly quarrelled with him for it."

"It is not possible, you know, Miss Betty, that Sam Dene could have done it," struck in Tod, who was boiling over with rage at the whole thing. "Some thief must have stolen in at the street door when Sam had left the room."

"Well no, that could hardly have been, seeing that Charles never left the street door after that," returned Miss Betty, mildly. "It appears to be a certain fact that not a soul entered the room after the young man left it. And there lies the puzzle of it."

Putting it to be as Miss Betty put it—and I may as well say here that nothing turned up, then or later, to change the opinion—it looked rather suspicious for Sam Dene. I think the Squire saw it.

"I suppose you are sure the box was on the table when you left the room, Miss Betty?" said he.

"Why, of course I am sure, Squire," she answered. "It was the last thing my eyes fell on; for, as I went through the door, I glanced back to see that I had left the table tidy. Susan can bear witness to that. Dutton, the police sergeant, thinks some demon of mischief must be in that box—meaning the Deuce, you know. Upon my word it looks like it."

Susan came in with some glasses and ale as Miss Betty spoke, and confirmed the testimony—which did not need confirmation. As she closed the parlour door, she said, after her mistress had passed out, she noticed the box standing on the table.

"Is Sam here to-day—in the office?" asked Mr. Jacobson.

"O my goodness, no," cried Miss Betty in a fluster. "Why, Frederick, he has not been here since Thursday, when they had him up at the Guildhall. He couldn't well come while the charge is hanging over him."

"Then I think we had better go out to find Sam, and hear what he has to say," observed Mr. Jacobson, drinking up his glass of ale.

"Yes, do," said Miss Betty. "Tell poor Sam I'm as sorry as I can be—pestered almost out of my mind over it. And as to their having found one of the guineas in his pocket, please just mention to him that I say it might have slipped in accidentally."

"One of the guineas found in Sam's pocket!" exclaimed Mr. Jacobson, taken aback.

"Well, I hear so," responded Miss Betty. "The police searched him, you see."

As the Squire and Mr. Jacobson went out, Mr. Cockermuth was coming in. They all turned into the office together, while we made a rush to Sam Dene's lodgings in Edgar Street: as much of a rush, at least, as the Saturday's streets would let us make. Sam was out, the young servant said when we got there, and while parleying with her Mrs Parslet opened her sitting-room door.

"I do not suppose Mr. Dene will be long," she said. "He has to appear at the town hall this morning, and I think it likely he will come home first. Will you walk in and wait?"

She handed us into her parlour, where she had been busy, marking sheets and pillow-cases and towels with "prepared" ink; the table was covered with them. Tod began telling her that Mr. Jacobson was at Worcester, and went on to say what a shame it was that Sam Dene should be accused of this thing.

"We consider it so," said Mrs. Parslet; who was a capable, pleasant-speaking woman, tall and slender. "My husband says it has upset Mr. Cockermuth more than anything that has occurred for years past. He tells his brother that he should have had it investigated privately, not have given Mr. Dene into custody."

"Then why did he let him do it, Mrs. Parslet?"

She looked at Tod, as if surprised at the question. "Mr. Cockermuth knew nothing of it; you may be sure of that. Captain Cockermuth had got the young man at the Guildhall and was preferring the charge, before Mr. Cockermuth heard a word of what was agate. Certainly that is a most mysterious box! It seems fated to give trouble."

At this moment the door opened, and a young lady came into the parlour. It was Maria. What a nice face she had!—what sweet thoughtful eyes!—what gentle manners! Sam's friends in the town were accusing him of being in love with her—and small blame to him.

But Sam did not appear to be coming home, and time was getting on. Tod decided not to wait longer, and said good morning.

Flying back along High Street, we caught sight of the tray of Dublin buns, just put fresh on the counter in Rousse's shop, and made as good a feast as time allowed. Some people called them Doubling buns (from their shape, I take it), and I don't know to this day which was right.

Away with fleet foot again, past the bustle round the town hall and market house, till we came to the next confectioner's and saw the apple-tarts. Perhaps somebody remembers yet how delicious those apple-tarts were. Bounding in, we began upon them.

While the feast was in progress, Sam Dene went by, walking very fast. We dashed out to catch him. Good Mrs. Mountford chanced to be in the shop and knew us, or they might have thought we were decamping without payment.

Sam Dene, in answer to Tod's hasty questions, went into a passion; swearing at the world in general, and Captain Cockermuth in particular, as freely as though the justices, then taking their places in the Guildhall, were not as good as within earshot.

"It is a fearful shame, Todhetly!—to bring such a charge against me, and to lug me up to the criminal bar like a felon. Worse than all, to let it go forth to the town and county in to-day's glaring newspapers that I, Sam Dene, am a common thief!"

"Of course it is a fearful shame, Sam—it's infamous, and all your friends know it is," cried Tod, with eager sympathy. "My father wishes he could hang the printers. I say, what do you think has become of the box?"

"Become of it!—why that that blundering Charles Cockermuth has got it. He was off his head with excitement at its being found. He must have come into the room and put it somewhere and forgotten it: or else he put it into his pocket and got robbed of it in the street. That's what I think. Quite off his head, I give you my word."

"And what fable is it the wretches have got up, about finding one of the guineas in your pocket, Sam?"

"Oh, bother that! It was my own guinea. I swear it—there! I can't stay now," went on Sam, striding off down High Street. "I am due at the town hall this minute; only out on bail. You'll come with me."

"You go in and pay for the tarts, Johnny," called back Tod, as he put his arm within Sam Dene's. I looked in, pitched a shilling on the counter, said I didn't know how many we had eaten; perhaps ten; and that I couldn't wait for change.

Crushing my way amid the market women and their baskets in the Guildhall yard, I came upon Austin Chance. His father held some post connected with the law, as administered there, and Austin said he would get me in.

"Can it be true that the police found one of the guineas about him?" I asked.

Chance pulled a long face. "It's true they found one when they searched him ——"

"What right had they to search him?"

"Well, I don't know," said Austin, laughing a little; "they did it. To see perhaps whether all the guineas were about him. And I am afraid, Johnny Ludlow, that the finding of that guinea will make it rather hard for Sam. It is said that Maria Parslet can prove the guinea was Sam's own, and that my father has had a summons served on her to appear here to-day. He has taken Sam's case in hand; but he is closer than wax, and tells me nothing."

"You don't think he can have stolen the box, Chance?"

"I don't. I shouldn't think him capable of anything so mean; let alone the danger of it. Not but that there are circumstances in the case that tell uncommonly strong against him. And where the deuce the box can have got to, otherwise, is more than mortal man can guess at. Come along."

JOHNNY LUDLOW

(To be concluded.)

A DREAM.

I.

"Wish me joy," he said, and turned,
With the laughter in his eyes;
"Mary, I have won a wife,
And my choice you must approve."
All my cheek and forehead burned,
With a feeling, not surprise;
And I felt that Death in Life,
Was the ending of my love.
"Slim she is, and like a fawn,
Wandering thro' the woodland ways;
And her voice is soft and low,
As the murmur of a dove.
And the promise of the dawn,
Blushes quickly in her face;
Mary, can you wonder so,
You, the sister of my love?"
So I tried to speak and smile,
Taking both his hands in mine;
Saying he was worthy her,—
Words that seemed to burn and choke.
From my breaking heart the while,
Tore the hopes that clasp and twine—
Then with all my pulse astir,
And my brain on fire—I woke!

II.

"Wish me well," he said, and gazed,
All his soul into my eyes;
"Mary, I would win a wife,
Do you care to listen who?"
As for me I stood amazed,
In a sort of glad surprise;
And the secret of my life,
Blossomed into beauty new.
"Tall and stately doth she go,
Like a queen through woodland ways;
And her voice is sweet and clear,
As a mated nightingale's.
Tell me, Mary, do you know,
Her, whom I would fitly praise;
But when I have called her dear,
Find no other word avails?"
All the autumn woodland seemed,
To awake in summer glow;
As with blush on cheek and brow,
I confessed him dear to me.
When I told him what I dreamed,
He made answer, laughing low:
"Did they never tell you how
Dreams go always contrary?"

G. B. STUART.

THE CRUISE OF THE RESERVE SQUADRON.

By Charles W. Wood,
Author of "Through Holland," etc.

STEADILY and with dignity the Reserve Squadron sailed down Channel. Falmouth had been given up, therefore we were outward bound. Not so many months ago I had been idling in these same waters, but in one of H. M. Brigs, and not accompanied by the life and animation of the Royal Reserve. There had been no anticipation of unknown scenes and possible adventures, no cruising for weeks to come in foreign seas. And, to confess the truth, we had a less serious-minded and studious set on board the Brig. No learned debates; no profound inquiry into the Laws of Nature, the Harmony of the Spheres, or the seducing study of Metaphysics or Philology.

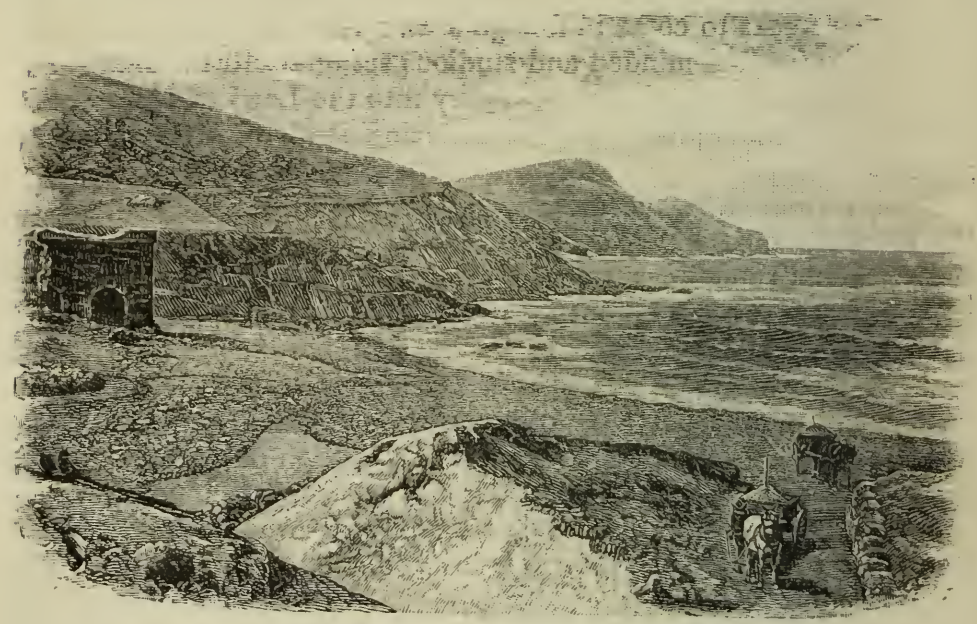
True, we were a smaller number in the Brig. Broadley and I, in his captain's quarters, had had it much to ourselves. The lieutenants would sometimes come in at night for a rubber, but whist, as it happened, was a weak point with them all. And one evening, when Bannockbairn revoked twice in the most unblushing manner, and Innisfail literally closed his eyes in slumber at a crisis in the game, we felt the time had come to break up the whist club for good. So we two fell back upon the milder dissipation of double dummy, and if not a very abstruse pastime, it was at least very innocent.

In the Brig it had been always a pleasure to watch and admire Broadley's way with the boys. His strict yet kindly manner; the stentorian voice in which he gave his orders; the indefatigable perseverance with which he saw them carried out. Sometimes, indeed, one had rather more than enough of drill. Clear decks, quiet, a dolce far niente existence would have been pleasanter. A favourite book, an idle lounge and talk at full length upon the stern gratings, revelling in calm seas, blue skies, soft zephyrs; surrounded by that wide expanse that man cannot touch or spoil or unhallow: fresh and pure as in the days when man was not: this would have been more to one's mind and mood. But duty before pleasure is the motto of all naval men; and carrying it out to the letter, they read us a beautiful lesson. It is more easy to profit by one good example than by a thousand precepts. Indirect sermons are the most telling. Lives most abundant in point, most forcible in example, most lasting in memory are those that have played the part of unconscious heroes in the world.

I have said that cruising about the Channel in the Brig was unaccompanied by the excitement of anticipated far-off scenes and adventures. Nevertheless, we rang our quiet changes. Especially pleasant

was the day we put into Fowey, and Mrs. Clare waved us a welcome from her sloping lawn: a light, coquettish vision on an emerald carpet. Fowey—prettiest, quaintest, most old-fashioned of places on this coast. Known to few; happily as yet unexplored by the insatiable modern tourist. Its quiet, crooked, humdrum but charming streets (if streets they can be called) take you back to days, thoughts, and impressions now seldom met with anywhere but in old-fashioned books: an atmosphere more and more retreating before the broad light of this realistic, destroying age.

In the afternoon of that day, a year ago, Mrs. Clare, dubbing herself captain, and taking the tiller ropes, safely piloted us through shallow waters up that lovely little river, landing us at a small old-



DOWN CHANNEL: CRACKINGTON COVE.

fashioned church in a secluded nook that might have been a corner in Paradise, and was worth its weight in gold. We trudged through romantic lanes, and climbed steep banks in search of nuts, dog-roses and honeysuckle, which all grew in wild and what seemed prodigal profusion; for apparently we had the neighbourhood to ourselves: a Garden of Eden, and we its one happy family. Not a sound smote the air, save the echo of our voices, or the ripple of a long laugh, dying away, as one or other, plunging boldly up the steep slopes to secure a prize, came down empty handed and with more haste than dignity.

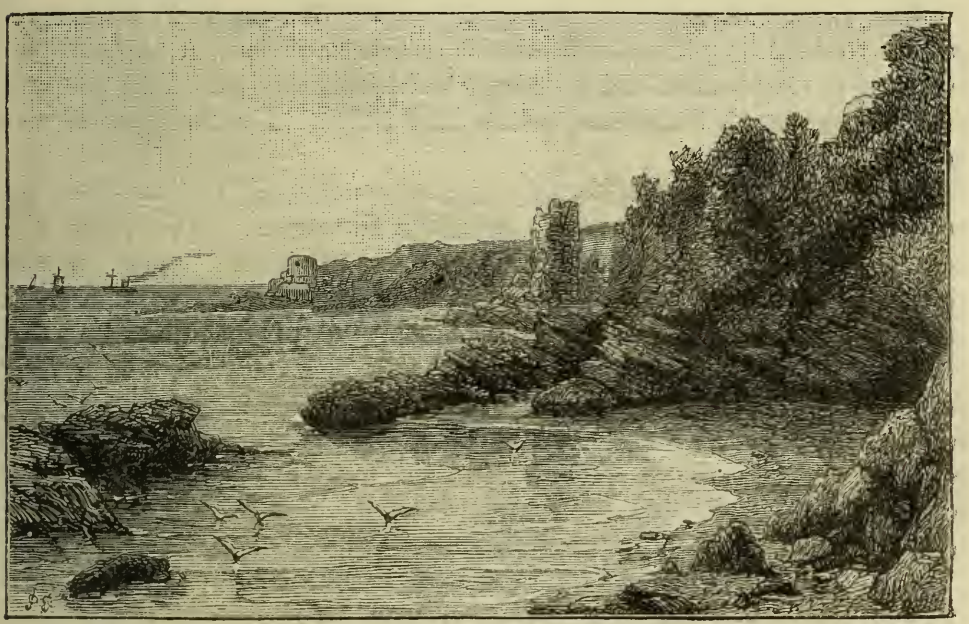
There are lovely spots on this Fowey river. Dreams of rural beauty that lie in the secret places of Cornwall and Devon, waiting the doom of discovery. These are known, as yet, only to the privileged few, and to the birds of the air, which make glad their precincts with songs of rapture; rejoicing that they have it all so much to

themselves. They build their nests in the highways and hedges, and the marauding element of Young England does not pass by and wantonly destroy their hope in the future. So they sing through the live-long day.

> " By shallow rivers, to whose falls
> Melodious birds sing madrigals."

Had we only ears to reach beyond mortal range, we might perhaps, in that far-off ether, discover a stream of rapturous melody, travelling onwards in illimitable space, sound and light mingling their inexhaustible and undying waves.

We had returned almost at ebb-tide. But for our lady-captain who like the birds, knew all the secrets and resources of the place,



FOWEY HARBOUR—MOUTH.

we should certainly have stranded, and had to wait until the next inflowing set us free. Long reaches of gravelly river-bed rendered our steering cunningly intricate. A heron, standing on one leg in the shallows, looked on with sleepy eyes, and croaked out a melancholy greeting. We passed one bend after another; skilful pilotage, many oars and strong hands making sure our progress. Then the quaint little town, with houses overhanging the water, and gazing for ever at their own reflections; the somewhat primitive club-house, the old church tower that dates back to Edward IV., the fine castellated structure of Plâce, and finally the steps by which we landed.

Undoubtedly it was a picturesque harbour. A large sheet of water almost land-locked, looking more like a lake than the inflowing of the ocean: low-lying hills, undulating in almost a complete circle, Fowey on one side, Polruan on the other. The cliffs, stretching upwards, boldly confront the sea, Blackbottle Head the highest point.

Near the harbour-mouth the ruined castles face each other, where once upon a time a chain swung from side to side, guarding the entrance. Ages ago: when these ruins were in their youth and glory, and took part in the life of England, its wars and commotions, its rise and progress. Those walls then vibrated to the blast of the trumpet or thrilled in listening to lovers' vows, impassioned as now, though perhaps delivered in less chosen strains. Then, as now, the sea broke at the foot of the crags, ebbed and flowed, knew its storms and its calms. Nature does not change. The earth keeps young, rolls for ever on her course, putting on new life with each returning year. Man and man's handwork alone must bow to the universal doom.

The coast line, opening out just beyond the harbour, tower and castle-crowned, is particularly broken and attractive. A picture in a brilliant setting looked the Brig as we approached her. But she was now tossing upon the waves, which had begun to show signs of unwonted animation.

A few days after, in spite of some adverse wind and weather, we worked into Falmouth, there to remain a few hours. The good old Rector was waiting to receive us with open arms. Later in the morning, when we were driving with him round Pendennis, and admiring the view: the old castle itself, the far-reaching sea, the splendid crescent of the bay, and the land that stretched to a fine point: the coachman suddenly pulled up his horses, and touching his hat with all the deference due to our venerable yet ever-youthful host, pointed to the vessel lying in the offing, and said in tones full of the pomp and pride of a loyal English subject: "That, sir, is one of Her Majesty's Training Brigs."

The Rector received the intelligence with becoming gravity, just the right amount of interest and surprise in his expression: Broadley and I exchanged amused glances: and the carriage went on. When we got back again, and Broadley was going up the gravel walk to the house, and I, for the thousandth time, was helping my old friend to alight safely on terra firma, I turned to the grey-headed coachman (I had known him long enough to have a bit of fun with him, and to gauge the measure of his emotions), and said: "Friend John, when you gave us that information about Her Majesty's Brig, you were not aware that you had the honour of driving the Brig's Commander."

It was worth watching the expression that came over old John's face. His glance fell on the retreating Broadley; his mouth opened, his face lengthened; a deep flush slowly rose to the surface. "Bless my soul, Mr. Charles!—you don't say so! I humbly beg pardon." And if anything could possibly have added to the pride of driving his revered master, it was the fact here recorded. John is a true, old-fashioned conservative at heart.

Then the Rector, grasping my arm, chuckled at old John's con-

sternation, as we went up the path: whilst old John himself drove away in a state of bewilderment. We went in, and for nearly three hours our host poured out, in an inexhaustible stream, all the riches of his learning, all the power of his eloquence, all his amazing wit and humour; resources that never fail him; and only the more amaze you as time knits closer the bonds of friendship.

Then came the hour for leaving: always a regretted moment under that roof. A walk down hill into the narrow, tortuous streets of the town, and at the steps our boat was waiting. Before long, the little Brig might have been seen, her sails set, flying before the wind that had again sprung up: as pretty an object, surrounded by all this lovely scenery, as could be wished for. With our glasses, we saw the Rector watching us from his windows, no doubt wishing us a silent God-speed. And, had the truth been known, I feel sure that old John had begged a seat in the observatory, and, directing a powerful telescope upon our movements, recounted his day's adventures to those around him.

All these past thoughts and experiences had risen up in our minds like buried phantoms, as now, just one year later, we again went down Channel with the Fleet. It could not be otherwise, as one familiar landmark, rock, cliff, town, harbour—the long-drawn lines and curves of Crackington Cove, Torbay with its curious rocks, the innumerable points of interest on this coast—appeared and passed away in glowing sunshine. It was impossible to be too thankful for this sunshine—for smooth waters and unclouded skies. In the Brig we had been at the mercy of the winds; here we were independent of those uncertain elements. To-day the almost dead calm only intensified our happiness and enjoyment.

So, as I have said, we left the coast of England behind us, and swept onwards into other regions. The eight vessels kept their exact position towards each other. The effect of this was to make us appear almost stationary, especially when out on the broad seas. By Saturday afternoon we had approached the Bay of Biscay: those waters famous in history, in battle, in song: and, alas, only too famous in the sad records of the deep. "To her the love of woman hath gone down:" and in the fury of her storms she knows no pity.

She received us in her kindest and gentlest mood; a perfect calm; nothing but a slight Atlantic roll that is seldom if ever absent. It was just enough to give life and motion to the *Defence* and make us feel that, after all, we were not stationary and not on land. A motion rather agreeable than not; an effect sleepy and soothing. It would have been a perfect idea of repose, but for the vibrations of the propeller.

For this reason that ideal rest at sea is only to be found in a sailing vessel. There the motion is inexpressibly delightful. There is no vibration of the screw to haunt you with its never-ceasing rhythm and tremulous quiver, finding out every bone in your spine

and reducing your head to chaos. You fly through the air easily as a bird on the wing. Invisible hands seem to waft you along. This indeed is the case; the hands of the kindly old Wind; the best of servants, though the worst of masters; a conquering foe unsparing in his wrath. And, in a dead calm, what more delicious than to lie motionless as a painted ship upon a painted ocean; work suspended, absolute idleness enforced upon you? It is our nearest approach to Elysium; and, so far, a feeling unknown on board a steamer.

The ships of the First Reserve were, of course, all under steam. But vessels of this size, again, yield a different experience from those of smaller build. The one will toss and struggle with every wave;

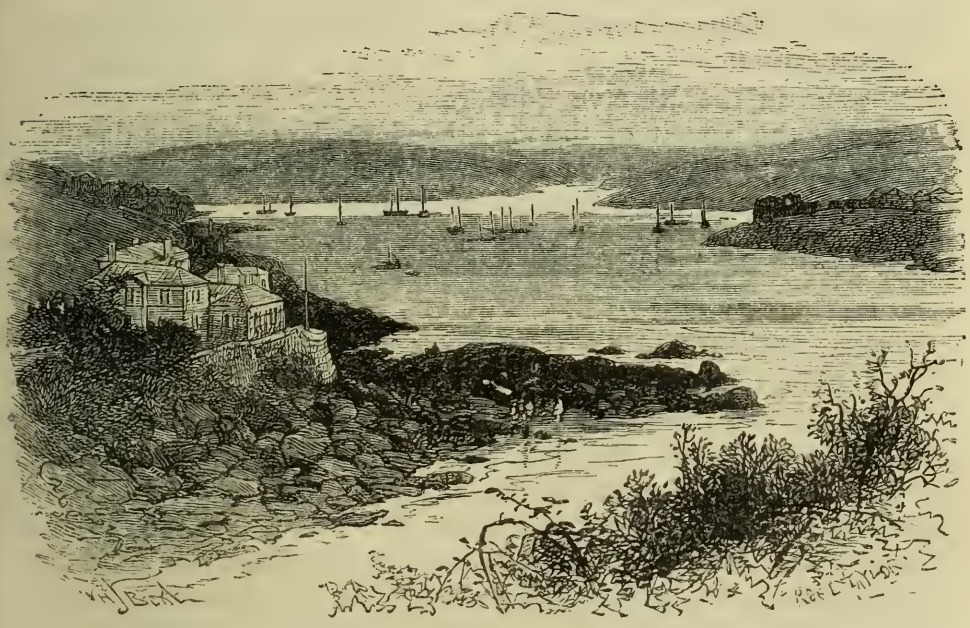
FOWEY.

the other cuts through the trough of the sea—is on one wave before she is off another, and so maintains a tolerable character for steadiness. But two out of the eight ships of the Fleet had a bad habit of rolling under the slightest provocation, and, unfortunately, the *Defence* was one of them.

It has been remarked that life on board ship must be monotonous. This certainly is not the case. Especially it is not so in a cruise taken for such a purpose as that of the First Reserve Squadron. The life is not an idle one, nor always easy. The men have to be worked and drilled, though there must be intervals of relaxation. Suddenly, perhaps in one of those do-nothing periods, the wind blowing gusts, the Flagship signals for some evolution to be performed aloft—perhaps "Make sail." At once the men crowd the rigging: swarm up like locusts; hang on from yard-arms apparently by a thread, or as flies from a ceiling. Those who lately were snugly housed in their little white Coastguard cottages, or, at most, patrolling

their beat on substantial terra-firma, are now racing aloft like cats: and, though it may be blowing like two gales lashed together, the work has to be done.

The decks meanwhile are crowded with men running about, pulling ropes, making fast or letting loose. All is apparently hopeless discord: in reality, it is every man to his rope, every rope in its place. The noise and confusion; the orders flying: now to the men on deck, now shouted to those at the mast-head, or near it, amaze and bewilder a landsman. He begins to shake in his shoes. Put himself where he will, he still feels in the way. At last, in despair, he is inclined to rush below, or precipitate himself bodily down the



FOWEY HARBOUR.

windsail, that, stretched out with wings like an ominous bird of prey, gives air (it has already been described) to the ward-room.

Suddenly, there is dead silence, an awful pause. The next instant an order is shouted, and away they tear along the deck, a double line of men, marines and blue-jackets. In less time than seems possible, every sail is set in the eight vessels. Where, a moment ago, bare masts and yards only were to be seen, now all is swelling and spreading canvas, which adds so much to the beauty of a ship scudding through the waves. It is an excessively interesting, a really grand manœuvre to watch.

Again there is a pause and silence. The sails set, the next thing is to take them in. Everything that has just been done has now to be undone. Once more comes the signal from the Flagship. Once more orders are shouted, men are flying; confusion reigns in this small town, and the tearing and whistling of the wind again make you feel utterly bewildered and befogged. The whole, thing seems

resolved to chaos: your mind goes with it. Out of this chaos, however, order is presently restored. Sails are neatly furled, ropes coiled down. The officers may be approached with safety. The men sink into quietness and invisibility. It is as though a magician's wand has been at work, and a magician's silence ensues; the rest of a paradise; the calm following the storm.

These drills and manœuvres are especially interesting to a looker-on. To see order gradually resolved out of chaos is an experience beautiful and improving as it is rare. To hear a direction shouted to the main royal, as intelligible to you as if it were Chinese, and to find that it has been understood by the men aloft; that what to you was Chinese was plain English to them, amazes you not a little. Your admiration and respect for them as an intelligent race rises accordingly.

I have said that idleness forms no part of the duty on board a man-of-war in the Reserve Squadron. Let us take one day's sea-routine for the benefit of the uninitiated reader: and one day was a reproduction of all other days, Sunday excepted. We will begin at the beginning, and call it Monday morning.

4 A.M. The watch and day men are mustered. After that, the upper deck is scrubbed and ropes are coiled down. (The ropes have been previously coiled *up* by the middle watch at 3.30.)

6 o'ck. Lash up and stow hammocks. (The hammocks are stowed in the nettings all round the upper deck.)

6.30. Bugle sounds—"Cooks to the galleys." Immediately the cooks of the different messes haste—not "to the wedding"—but to the galley, with their mess kettles, for the ship's allowance of cocoa. (Here an innovation might be suggested. As soon as the bugle has sounded, the cooks to go right round the upper deck in procession, one behind another, performing a classical or Bacchanalian dance, as seen in ancient pictures, upraising their kettles, and sounding a continuous alarm: then repair to the galley. The effect would be picturesque and striking.)

6.45. Pipe to breakfast. (The punctuality with which this call is sounded is a credit to the boatswain's-mate. It does one good to observe the quickness of the response.)

7.15. Watch coming on deck to wash. (Cleanliness is next to godliness; and the men scrub and tub themselves as if, realising the truth of the proverb, they would take full benefit thereof. The question is how far they allow cleanliness to do duty for the remainder. On an Arctic night we may see the warm glow of a fire from the wrong side of a window; and in the cold it will be of no more use to us than the delights in a confectioner's window to a famishing wretch who, gazing upon them from without, still dies of hunger.) Whilst the watch above are washing, the watch below are cleaning mess deck.

7.30. Watch on deck fall in. Clean wood and bright work.

8 o'ck. Bugle—Quarters—Clean guns.

8.30. Bugle—Clean arms.

8.45. Bugle—to disperse. Hands to clean in the rig of the day (this is made by signal from the Flagship every morning at seven o'clock) and stow bags.

9.15. Divisions. Prayers.

9.30. Divisional drill for the watch : either gun or rifle drill.

11 o'ck. Watch drill : such as "Shift jib"—"Shift a course" or "Topgallant mast"—or "Out collision mat"—&c., &c. (We hope this is sufficiently intelligible to the reader. If not, further explanation would only be rendering the confusion of his mind worse confounded.)

11.30. Clear up decks.

11.45. Bugle for cooks to galley. (Procession and classical dance to be repeated.)

Noon. Pipe to dinner. Great stir and excitement amongst the men. Pêle mêle disappearance below—but no noise allowed. Sea air begets hunger as well as health.)

1.15 P.M. Bugle—Quarters—Clean guns.

1.30. Disperse—Watch fall in—Divisional drill : either rifle or cutlass drill. (The latter is very interesting.)

3 o'ck. Watch drill aloft. (If it is blowing hard, this is exciting to a landsman, and looks dangerous. He feels compassion for the men, who not only have to brave the perils of the deep, but apparently those of the air also. A cat has nine lives ; and surely if these men did not resemble that domestic animal in their powers of climbing and clinging to nothing, as well as in their nine chances, few would survive even a short cruise like that of the Royal Reserve Squadron.)

3.30. Clear up decks.

3.45. Bugle for cooks to galley. (Procession and dance for the third time. All this would help to impress upon man that after all he is a greedy animal, with self-begotten and artificial wants that need constantly supplying : that he is more or less self-indulgent and given to the pleasures of the table. That when those pleasures are well dressed, abundant, choice and varied, he is amiable, lenient in his views, mild in administering reproof, a boon companion, the most delightful of hosts. But when these pleasures and supplies fall short of perfection, look out for squalls and easterly winds. From this sweeping and humiliating characteristic, can we conscientiously separate the members of the R. N. ?)

4 o'ck. Pipe to supper. (This is the last meal—and it is a light one—that the men have until breakfast the next morning. No wonder the pipe to breakfast at 6.45 scarcely sounded before it was obeyed.

4.30. Out pipes. Sweepers.

4.45. Bugle—quarters for inspection. After quarters, Drill for the hands (usually lasting an hour or more), such as "Make plain sail,"

"Shift topsails," or "Topgallant mast," &c. Afterwards shortening and furling sail. (The work for the day may then be said to be over.)

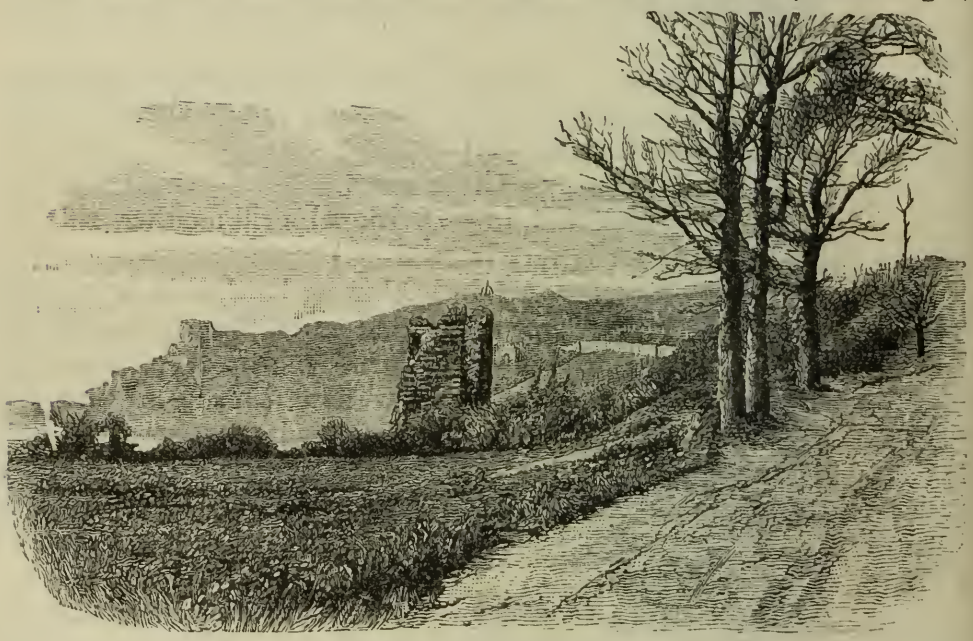
7.15. Down guard and steerage hammocks.

7.30. Stand by hammocks. All hammocks are then taken out of the nettings and hung up between decks, each man having his respective billet.

8.45. Clear up decks for the rounds—Out pipes.

9 o'ck. Rounds—when the Commander goes round all decks, reporting the same "correct" to the Captain: all lights in messes and fires being extinguished.

At sea the watch is relieved every four hours, day and night,



FOWEY: ESPLANADE.

excepting 4 to 8 in the afternoon. These hours are divided into two watches—4 to 6 and 6 to 8—commonly called "Dog watches." This enables the watches to change and change about. For instance, the watch on duty from 8 to 12 one night, will the next night be on duty from 12 to 4.

All drills and evolutions during the cruise were made by signal from the Flagship, taking time from her. The watch drills were never long or irksome, thus giving plenty of time for odd jobs, which are continually cropping up, to be done both in forenoon and afternoon watches, such as stropping blocks, splicing ropes, refitting rigging, &c.

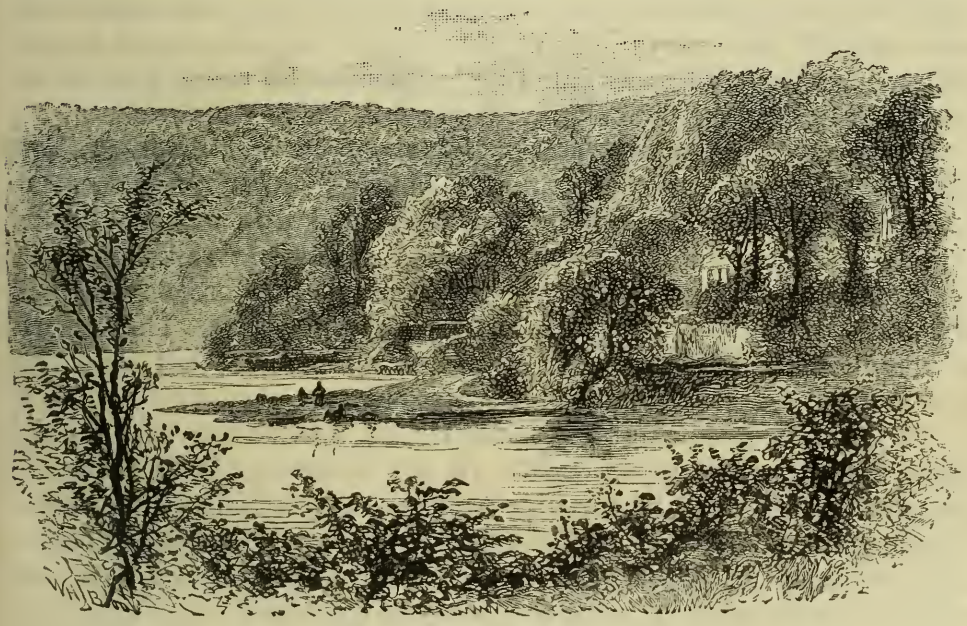
Both forenoon and afternoon, weather permitting, "steam tactics" were generally carried on, the Fleet going through various manœuvres under the direct supervision of the Admiral. This was done irrespective of all drills which were carried on at the same time; the tactics being

performed exclusively by the Captain, Staff-commander, and Officer of the watch.

Wednesday forenoon was always taken for general quarters, when the ship is cleared for action and the guns' crews are exercised. Friday evening, after quarters, fire stations were generally exercised, when the pumps were hove round. Saturday was always taken for cleaning ship throughout, and no drills were done—except in the evening, after quarters, when sail drill was usually carried out.

And now to take up our interrupted thread and continue our cruise.

On that Saturday afternoon, when the sea and the skies were blue,



FOWEY: UP THE RIVER.

and we were making quiet and steady way, our calm was suddenly disturbed by the cry of "Man overboard." Instantly every engine was stopped and the eight vessels were brought-to. The man fell from the *Hercules*. In this smooth water there was no danger of losing sight of him. He struggled towards the buoy that had been thrown out, and grasped it. In less time than seemed possible boats were lowered, but that of the *Defence* was the first one out, picked him up, and took him back to his ship. Then the Fleet went on again.

There is something startling in this cry at sea. It rings with a sound of life or death. Rescue depends upon you. If not quick enough, the man may sink from exhaustion, and in an agony of helplessness you see him go down for ever. Half an hour ago he was strong and full of life: the contrast is too sudden and awful to be realised. In a rough sea he may never be found, though you search

long and diligently, and every glass sweeps the water. In misery you picture the despair of the poor fellow, losing hope and chance with every passing moment.

This was nearly the case in returning homewards. A strong gale was blowing in the Bay of Biscay, a tremendous sea running, and a man fell overboard from the yard-arm of the *Hercules*. It seemed a hopeless matter. The ocean was rolling in great hills and valleys; the wind, rushing with fury, shrieked and whistled in the rigging; the clouds were dark and lowering, the water was almost black with their gloomy reflections. Though early in the afternoon, it was neither night nor day, but sombre twilight. For many minutes —moments that seemed hours—it was impossible to find him, though the boats were out, and their crews buffeting with the waves, and watching the ships for direction. At length, when it seemed useless to hope any longer, he was found and rescued. So rough was the sea that with the utmost difficulty the boats were hoisted up again.

Sunday morning the brightness of the weather had changed. The Bay of Biscay, nevertheless, was still kindly in its mood. Some of the officers, indeed, said they had never crossed it in waters so calm. The two civilians on board were grateful. Excellent sailors as they were, it was well to get their sea-legs into order before anyone had a chance of finding out whether anything was wrong. Though undoubtedly equal to the roughest elements, they were not unwilling that it should remain amongst the uncertainties.

The weather not being propitious, Divine Service was held on the main, instead of the upper deck. In the latter case it is more impressive. Surrounded by the wide waste of waters, the restless ocean, type at once of our lives and of eternity, the small distractions, trifles and incidents of shore exist not. Nature is at her grandest and noblest: man cannot be irresponsive to the influence.

The Church Pendant was flying from every vessel, and for the time being all other considerations were lost sight of and put aside for the combined act of worship.

To-day, on the main-deck, all we could see of the water came to us through the port-holes. Service was held in the battery of the vessel, the guns pointing on each side. A reading-desk was arranged, draped with a flag; the singing was led by a harmonium. The bell tolled a few minutes before service began, but the single stroke struck at intervals had the melancholy sound of a "passing bell" rather than aught else. Being nothing but the ship's bell, however, it was a very mild edition of a church-peal. The men, row after row, were on benches in front of the Chaplain, so that he had them well in hand. The Captain and officers were at the side and behind the reading-desk. It was impossible to sail with the Chaplain of the *Defence* without soon feeling for him a high esteem. He was the type of what a parson should be in daily life, and in all manner of conversation. For the sailors he was especially the right man in the

right place. And a difficult and discouraging task often is that of chaplain to a man-of-war.

Sunday afternoon was always pleasant on board. There was a stillness and repose, even in the very air we breathed. Sanskrit, whist, backgammon, arguments, everything was put out of sight for the day; we enjoyed rest and leisure.

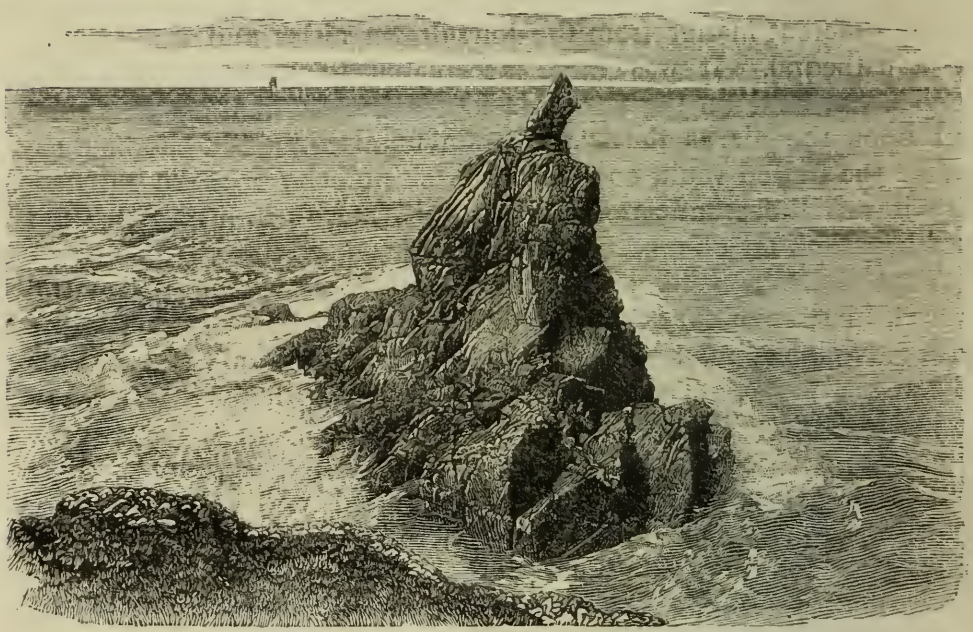
Service was held twice every Sunday on board the *Defence*. The men were obliged to attend in the morning, but their presence in the evening was optional. The Chaplain instituted his own form of worship at night. A short prayer or two; then the sermon; after that, a portion of the evening liturgy. Always plenty of singing, which the men liked, and occasionally would join in rather too heartily. On the main-deck you have a low roof to contend with; a very different matter from the long-drawn aisles and fretted vaults of a cathedral. It was more acceptable to sensitive ears when service was held on the upper deck. There the men's voices rolled out upon the air as they "the strain upraised." But the blue sky, unlike the fretted vault, could send back no echo or make response. Yet it was the grandest of all domes; Nature's own minster; pure and beautiful, far off and eternal.

That Sunday evening we had a glorious and almost unearthly sunset, in strange contrast with the past day. The sky was flushed with rosy clouds, scattered in fleecy fragments, and looking very much like angels' wings. The crescent moon "paled with glory" as she sank to the horizon. The water, reflecting the colours of the sky, turned almost to a blood-red as the sun dipped and disappeared. Night and darkness came on; the stars sparkled and scintillated with a lustre seen only in a rarified atmosphere. The constellations stood out; a planet down in the west looked large and beautiful as a young moon. Nights such as these are rare in England. If we ever have them at all, it is in wintry weather, when half one's energy is absorbed in endeavouring to keep warm. It was chilly, even to-night, but only sufficiently so to be bracing. We were fast approaching latitudes where we should have more heat than we cared about. Under the Rock of Gibraltar, we might presently sigh in vain for cool days and night's temperate breezes.

Monday dawned squally and unpleasant. The sea rolled; the good ship responded by rolling also. The motion, distinctly uncomfortable, was heroically endured. Say what you will, the unknown martyrs of the world are legion. Unnumbered lives of heroism have gone down unrecognised. They die and make no sign. We, too, never murmured; perhaps because the *Defence* made us feel she could do much more than this if she chose. Gradually we sighted the Coast of Spain, but not within distance to enjoy it. Outlines there were, heights and wavy undulations, faint and shadowy, and that was all. Again the evening cleared, the night grew warm and pleasant. Again the crescent moon went down, and the sky was studded with its

glittering worlds. From that time out we never had another hour's bad weather until, weeks later, we once more entered the Bay of Biscay, homeward bound.

We made such good progress that on Tuesday morning we entered Arosa Bay. A long reach of undulating land on both sides, alternately barren and cultivated, rocky and fertile. Green slopes rose above the long white stretches of sand upon the shore, in vivid contrast, and rocks grey and desolate took their place. Here a cluster of houses, no doubt the habitations of fishermen, gave some idea of life to the scene: only to pass out of sight and render yet more desolate those long stretches of almost deserted country. It was a lone-looking land. The voice of man was seldom



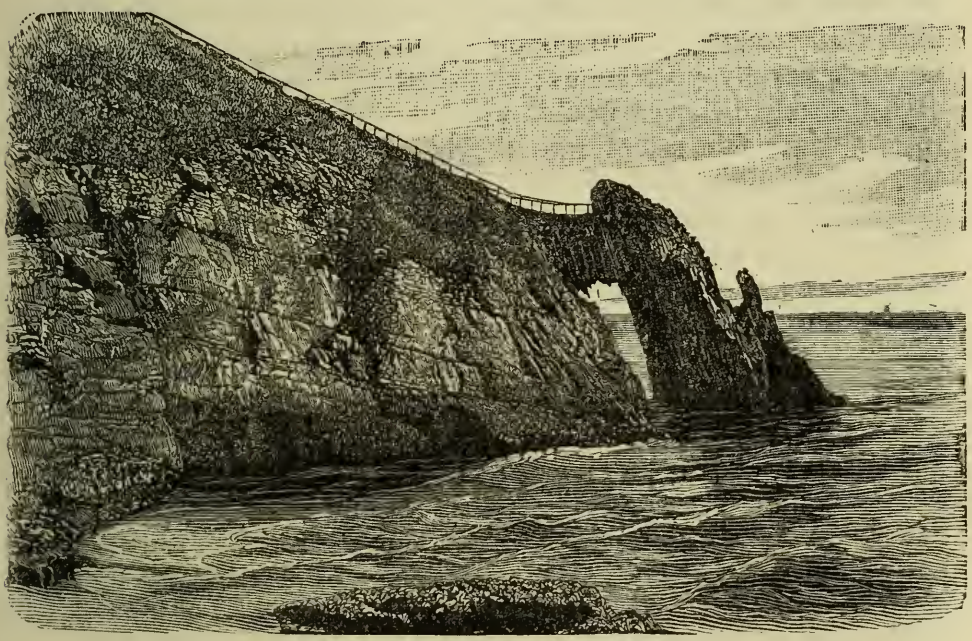
BISHOP ROCK.

heard there; a footprint upon the sand might have raised an exclamation. But it was excessively picturesque; especially to eyes that for some days past had seen little beyond a waste of wide waters. One soon grows tired of "water, water everywhere." It needs the relief of land to throw out a contrast and furnish a steadfast object to gaze upon. So Arosa Bay was hailed with delight, and proved refreshing. Without being especially cultivated and fertile, it is really beautiful. There are no orange groves within sight to seduce one, or olive plantations with their sage-green foliage; but the scenery is sufficiently diversified, the undulations are numerous and varied. Far-off hills tower in the background; you feel at once that you are in the land of mountains.

All this we noted as we passed up between the shores. It seemed quite a long journey. A little group of women and children, collected on a tongue of land jutting out into the Bay, waved us a frantic

welcome, while marvelling what in the world this wonderful invasion could mean. Truly it was a rare, one might even say a magnificent sight. Noble as the ships looked out upon the seas, they were far more imposing sailing up into the land. In the narrowed waters their size and beauty could be better appreciated.

At length we rounded a corner, and, in the broad harbour of the Bay, by a signal from the Flagship, every vessel turned a quarter of a circle together. Thus from eight ships two lines ahead, we suddenly altered into eight ships four lines ahead, and so steamed up the Bay. Then at a given signal from the Flagship, every vessel at the same moment let go her anchor. It was the day of the Accession of Queen Victoria: the 20th June. As the anchors fell, at the same instant



DOWN CHANNEL: TORBAY.

every vessel dressed: from stern to mast-head, and from mast-head to bows, one rainbow of flags. This done we fired a royal salute of twenty-one guns.

The sight was imposing and inspiriting in the highest degree: the effect more telling that all the ships dressed simultaneously, as if by magic. The guns thundered forth twenty-one, eight times multiplied, and the sound went echoing over the land, far up into the hills. It must have astonished the natives yet more than our sudden appearance; for the greater part of them were no doubt unaware of the approaching visit of the Reserve Squadron. The white smoke cleared away, rolled off into the blue sky, dissolved and disappeared in ether. The silence that ensued was delicious. In calm and quiet we began to take note of the scene before us.

Later on in the afternoon we did more. We landed and made acquaintance with the wonders of Arosa, the little town of Carril, its

ill-paved streets or streets not paved at all. Stagnation and idleness seemed to be the order of the day. Only a few heavily laden donkeys could be seen, staggering along in the consuming heat, and they quickly and mysteriously disappeared under archways that faced long stretches of cultivated land. Mountains rose beyond, full of sleepy beauty, clothed in a golden haze that, yet further off, melted into the purple.

Not one of us could speak Spanish; and the signs and contortions, fearful and wonderful, that we made in our efforts to establish a clear understanding with the natives, would have qualified any one of us to take part with the three idiots in "Patience." We electrified the fruit women sitting in the shadow of the Custom House. Either from terror at our gestures, or admiration at our collected appearance, they were ready to allow us to go off bodily, and without payment, with all their worldly possessions: strawberries, cherries, luscious melons, and, I firmly believe, would, without the slightest hesitation, have thrown their fair selves into the bargain. Truly, we should have had full measure.

Indeed we had not landed five minutes before a bright-eyed, beautiful and captivating Spanish girl at an upper window, cast a splendid lily at Pyramid, then clasped her hands and looked at him with a lingering, languishing gaze. We afterwards found that she was the great heiress of the place, kept under strict watch and ward by a cruel parent. Pyramid was evidently the one on whom she had with sudden inspiration fixed her affections and hopes of rescue. And no wonder. With his handsome face and magnificent presence, whenever he was of the landing party no one had a ghost of a chance of a glance, or a lily, or anything else. He was about to respond to this tender and mute appeal, when suddenly the huge hand of a grim duenna was seen to clutch at the fair beauty. The vision was withdrawn with slight ceremony, and a hastily closed venetian shut in a despairing cry.

Il faut payer pour ses plaisirs. Pyramid, in honour bound, had to walk about the whole afternoon with his gage d'amour—not in his button hole, for it was large as a speaking trumpet—but delicately and gallantly held between his fingers. Every now and then, when he thought no one was looking, a blushing glance was bestowed upon it; and—I felt sure—a mental vow recorded to return some day and rescue that fair vision from its cruel, close confinement. His fate was sealed from that hour.

The next day a special train to Santiago was put on for the Duke and the officers of the Fleet. But the wonders of this quaint and ancient town—this Pilgrim resort—this second City in the world, from a Roman Catholic and religious point of view—must be left to next month.

A RING AND THE RED BOOK.

"YOUR name?" demanded the adjutant.

"Stuart Challinor."

"Rank and regiment?"

"Lieutenant, 112th Royal Manx, First battalion."

"Married, or otherwise?"

"Otherwise," I replied, promptly, inwardly wondering how much more information of a personal nature I should be required to furnish for the enlightenment of the Staff of the School of Musketry, Losthaven.

"Religion?"

"Well, I dare say that from one point of view I should not be considered a strict churchman ——"

"Then you'll have to take the men to chapel, that's all," interrupted, sharply, the adjutant, whose time was precious, rapidly filling in a form.

I hastily professed myself as orthodox as possible; mentioned that I had brought six men with me; was informed that my room was No. 3, D passage, and dismissed, giving place to one of some half-dozen other officers arrived, like myself, for a two-months' course of Musketry Instruction.

As I crossed the parade ground in search of my new quarters, a well-known voice struck on my ear: one of those aggravating high-pitched ones that *will* be listened to. It proceeded from one of a group of officers lounging under a spreading beech tree.

"I should invert the whole system. The first and second lectures are so much time wasted. Gravitation, parallel lines, angles—Why, every fellow knows all that from his earliest infancy. Position drill —— "

"Hallo, Loxdale!" I sang out, and wished I hadn't next moment, for he turned sharp upon me, and his audience dispersed with suspicious alacrity.

"Challinor! *You* here! When did you come? What have you come for? Going in for the Instructorship, eh? Very odd that *I* never heard you were coming! I came yesterday. Got a room? Which? Next mine, I see. Want furniture? Don't go to the big upholsterer. *I'll* show you where to get what you want. Come along! we've time to do the Parade and look about us before mess. Lots of people down for the season. Never mind getting into mufti!" and he bore me away overwhelmed on the flood tide of his energy.

Loxdale belonged to our second battalion. I knew him at the depôt, and liked him better than most men did. He was a good little fellow at heart, and did me, a raw youngster, many a kind turn

unobtrusively; but his powers of conversation were against him in general society.

He was a perfect abyss of useless information, and by the constant imparting thereof made life hideous to his immediate neighbours. When he wasn't imparting it he was acquiring it, and I don't know which process was the more wearing to one's brain. Nothing was too trivial or too mighty for his inquiring mind, from the future policy of the Government on any given question, to the contents of a dish carried home by a small child under her apron from the baker's.

True to his promise, he showed me Losthaven from end to end, discoursing the while on its manners, customs, antiquities, traditions, and local gossip, at a pace only equalled by a cathedral verger with another party in waiting. But he interspersed his gossip with some really interesting talk about the past-and-gone days of the quaint little town: when it was a real haven, before its river disappeared and its harbour silted up, and the heavy-woolled marsh sheep browsed on the low-lying pastures, where four goodly ships of war for the King once rode at anchor.

Up to the rambling little town, full of sleepy sunshine, with its one long street zig-zagging round the foot of a hill, the deserted pavements echoing the foot-fall of the borough's one policeman. Loxdale piloted me up a blind alley and into a back-yard, where his own special tradesman was discovered, preparing himself, with the assistance of the pump, for his evening meal. Loxdale looked after my needs in a most fatherly manner, and was in the midst of describing a new idea of his own in camp furniture, when a mighty crash and rumble arose, and the roll of passing wheels and clatter of prancing hoofs. The grin of respectful derision faded from the furniture vendor's face, and was succeeded by an expression of delighted excitement.

"The Wrencotes carriage!" he exclaimed; "and Sir 'Enry and one of the ladies," dodging, as he spoke, to get a glimpse of the beautiful vision over our shoulders, and so down the alley to get another sight of the show.

"There they are, sir, stopping at Barwood's. It's not Miss Octavia, sir! It's Mrs. Berrington!"

"Come along," said Loxdale, eagerly; "I want to look at them."

A handsome old-fashioned barouche nearly eclipsed the modest shop-front of "Barwood's." Sir Henry, stout, rubicund, and white moustached, reclined heavily in one corner; of his fair companion I could see nothing at first but a knot of blue-black hair under a marvellous bonnet, composed apparently of peacocks' eyes and an aigrette, a somewhat full, graceful figure, cased in green velvet encrusted with masses of gold embroidery, a gold-mounted parasol trimmed with peacocks' feathers, and a tiny hand, that, languidly gesticulating, set half a dozen bangles flashing in the sunshine round the slender wrist as she issued her orders to the great Barwood,

alderman and churchwarden, who stood obsequious on the pavement.

"Who are they?" I asked. Loxdale was equal to the occasion.

"That's Sir Henry Corless, of Wrencotes, *the* great man of the county; owns everything for miles round; M.P. for Losthaven, of course. Yes, Losthaven *has* a member; also a mayor, also a policeman."

"But the lady ——"

"She's the daughter of an Irish baronet, Sir Darcy Darcy. You remember Castle Darcy, near our depôt; well, he was uncle to the present baronet, and a precious scamp, by all accounts. He was sent to Teherân on a diplomatic mission, disgraced himself somehow, and got turned adrift on the spot. He had the luck to marry the only child of a tremendously rich Armenian merchant, and she had the luck to lose him before he had had the spending of her money. This was their only child. The Darcy family took her into their care, and she married at fifteen a Yankee, Randolph Berrington, poet and millionaire: so the joint results of her birth and marriage make a sort of walking El Dorado of her. Sir Henry met her in the East last year; she had gone back to her own people, it seems, on Berrington's death. How she comes to be here, I can't say."

We had turned, and were sauntering slowly back on Barwood's side of the street. The big chestnuts, with a stamp and a clatter, were gathering themselves together for a start; Barwood was bowing a deferential adieu; Sir Henry dispensing bows right and left in quasi-regal fashion to the assembled public. Mrs. Berrington had sunk languidly back in her seat, and I had barely time to mark a fair, pale face with big lustrous Oriental eyes and a red-lipped, babyish mouth, when all further observation was startled out of me. For the peacock parasol swayed to one side and dropped, as the dark eyes met mine with a vivid flash of recognition; of startled pleasure; the red lips parted with a sudden exclamation: and with a graceful, *markedly* gracious bow, the fair vision was swept away from my sight.

I need hardly say that I received the greeting with an idiotic stare, and returned it in a violent hurry to the empty air. Loxdale fixed his keen little eyes on me in much amazement.

"So you're old friends!" with a long-drawn whistle of much meaning.

"Not a bit of it," I replied stoutly. Then, by a happy inspiration: "It was *you* she bowed to."

Loxdale walked silently back to barracks, lost in bewildered ponderings.

About thirty dined at mess that evening, mostly strangers to one another. I found myself next a young Indian officer, in whom I recognised an old schoolfellow; so I talked and he talked all through

dinner, and for an hour or so in the ante-room after it, raising the ghosts of our boyish friendships and pranks till, when I did get to bed, it was with my head full of old Harrow days and their doings. Not one thought did I consciously bestow on the red book, and yet it was *that* which haunted my slumbers, oddly enough, for I seldom dream at all. Yet there was that confounded thing open before me, with the words clear and distinct, "without in the slightest degree moving body, head, or eye, raise the rifle."

"*That's* Position drill. *I* know it. *I* don't want to dream of it," I found myself murmuring injuredly, and then tossing violently over, dozed off again. Again the book, distinct as ever. This time I was trying really hard to read it and have done with it, but something got between me and the sense like a thick black mist. "Loxdale's abominable system! May the father of all Projectories fly away with him and it!"

I was sitting bolt upright as I discharged this anathema, and then subsided peacefully. The book again! I was hard at work, but try as I would, again that immovable, impalpable obstacle, that gradually, as I gazed, took shape and colour and formed itself into a hand—a lady's hand, laid lightly on the page, fingers downwards. It was the left, I noticed, with a wedding-ring on the third finger. A soft, velvety, cream-white hand, with taper fingers, round and smooth: no salient points, no lines of work or wear, baby nails, pink and small, and a dimpled wrist. On the middle finger flashed a gem with a strange and evil light. I had never seen the stone before. It was the size of a lentil, of a rich olive-green hue, with an orange tawny sparkle as the hand moved slowly over the page. I tried to move away the book from behind it, to push it aside gently, to avert my eyes: in vain. Then I struck at it fiercely, and it vanished, and I was struggling in deep waters, a floating, slippery spar just beyond my grasp. I clutched it by a violent effort, and it slid from me, gently drawn away by a white, slim hand, and I sank with a rush and roar of water in my ears, that changed as I listened to guns and wild war-cries, and the trampling of men and horses; and I was lying with a dark savage face bending down to mine, and a hand at my throat. I had my revolver in my grasp, but as I raised my hand, soft white fingers closed round my wrist and held me powerless. Peril after peril succeeded, and in each I was lost: held back from rescue by that phantom clasp. I was desperate, furious; when from the tragic the situation dropped suddenly to the comic, and there was the red book again, with the hand laid lightly on the page. I felt as if for a moment the spell were broken, then sank into a heavy and dreamless sleep till roused, to my consternation, by the dressing bugle for parade.

My dream did not leave any impression behind it, except a curious one of reality. Its scenes ranged themselves in my memory amongst events that had really occurred, and stuck there undisturbed by the

series of drills and lectures of the next fortnight, or Loxdale's latest and most absorbing mania, an archæological one.

One day I discovered in the ante-room Sir Henry Corless's cards "for Captain Loxdale" and "for Mr. S. Challinor." How long they had lain there I could not guess. "Why for *you*, I wonder?" remarked Loxdale. So did I. We had not had a chance of returning the call, when, coming in from the first day's shooting, I found an invitation awaiting me to dinner at Wrencotes. Loxdale was really injured this time. "Now why should he have asked *you?* He might have heard of *me* from his son, but *you* ——." I was unable to enlighten him in the slightest degree, and too much astonished and elated at having actually made the best shooting in my wing to be roused to emotion by any occurrence of minor importance.

Wrencotes is a beautiful old house, low, rambling, and picturesque, buried in fir woods on a hill-side, about six miles from Losthaven. We drove over together, and were received by Sir Henry with ponderous graciousness, and introduced by him to "My sister, Miss Corless," a majestic figure in satin, and armour of jet, very like her brother; then by her to "My nieces, Miss Octavia and Miss Letitia Corless," two imposing young women of the fresh-complexioned, Roman-nosed type of beauty, like their aunt, dressed in peacock-blue, with gold cordage enough for the rigging of a small schooner pendent about them.

The local doctor followed with his wife, then came one of the Captain Instructors with *his* wife, then the vicar, and then a pause, during which the clock chimed suggestively, and Miss Corless exchanged an acid little grimace with Miss Octavia, and *then*—a door at the far end of the long drawing-room opened softly, and up the long vista of yellow satin and Louis Quatorze decoration there stole, like a streak of moonlight, a tall, graceful, white figure. On she floated in her clinging, shimmering, noiseless draperies. A broad, soft, silky scarf of pale uncertain blue was knotted round her waist, a string of big pearls encircled her white throat. I noticed her dress first; when she got near enough for me to see her face I could look at nothing else.

"Beautiful! Most beautiful!" I kept saying to myself. Dusky hair, rippling down like the Clytie's on a broad white forehead. Straight brows, delicately pencilled, and eyes beneath them: not the brown that I somehow expected, but grey, witching Irish grey! There were handsome women present, but they and their dresses sank one and all into shadow beside this queen of beauty, who stood filling the room with her loveliness as a rose with its fragrance, and gazing with those bright, mysterious eyes, straight into mine.

Sir Henry, actually roused into fussy devotion, received a faint little gracious smile. Another fell to Loxdale's share when Sir Henry introduced him, and then she turned and stood before me with outstretched hand, the colour coming and going in her fair face.

"*We* are old friends. Do you not remember me, Mr. Challinor?"

I held the slender, clinging fingers in mine for a moment, muttering something unintelligible in my bewilderment, and then she passed me with Loxdale, and I followed the rest mechanically in to dinner.

I found myself opposite to her, with a green and spiky erection intervening. The doctor's wife evidently considered her black eyes and yellow gown thrown away upon an insignificant subaltern like myself, and devoted herself to her dinner in silence, leaving me free to listen to the low musical voice that now and then caught my ear athwart the buzzing and clatter of the table.

Loxdale seemed to take his good fortune very unconcernedly. I heard him, as was his wont, acquiring information by the simple method of point-blank questions. Once across the leafy trophy, a long sideway glance fell on me from under Mrs. Berrington's curly-fringed eyelids: a look of intense, wistful interrogation.

I felt confused, almost to annoyance, by this mute correspondence, yet wholly fascinated. My other neighbour, Miss Letitia Corless, tried to draw me out—even to flirt with me—in a majestic manner, and as one mindful of the duties of hospitality; but I chiefly sat absent and silent, waiting hungrily for another word, another look.

A dull, green gleam, an olive-tawny glitter caught my eyes through the branching sprays of fern. Caught my eyes and held them fixed, as if it were the baleful gaze of some evil creature crouching to do me a mischief. Then I could see a slender white hand—the left—ungloved and blazing with jewels, resting for a moment on the edge of the table. Only for a moment, yet in that flash of time all the horror of my dream came back and encompassed me. Closing my eyes, I fought a brief desperate battle with my fancy, blindly conscious that a problem lay before me which I must not now attempt to solve.

We returned to the drawing-room, to find the ladies divided into two groups—one round the piano, the other round a photograph-strewn table. I joined the latter, graciously received by Letitia, who offered to show me her own special album, and into it I plunged.

Then the first notes of a clear, sweet voice vibrated through me, and I sat rapt and speechless till the little Irish ballad ceased.

I involuntarily turned. Sir Henry had established himself by the piano with an air of proprietorship. Loxdale, silent for once, stood bolt upright behind the singer. I could see a round, white shoulder. The voice again: this time she sang a soft, monotonous, simple air, with a queer drowsy charm in it.

I looked round again. Sir Henry was sleeping—the sleep of tranquil digestion. Miss Corless, with sisterly thoughtfulness, had drawn her chair before him, so as to screen this lapse of hospitality, and was talking parish work to the vicar.

"Have you seen the conservatory?" suddenly asked Letitia. I seized the chance, and we stepped through a window into a depth of

cool green gloom and flower scent. We dawdled amongst the ferns and half-seen tropic blossoms, till a welcome sound of crashing wheels announced the arrival of Loxdale's trap. I bid a semi-tender, regretful adieu in my very best style and made for the door, but stopped short, as a fair white vision arose before me, and Mrs. Berrington's voice said, "Do not go yet, Mr. Challinor: I have hardly seen you. Your father wants you at once, Letty; we will wait for you here." She pointed to a low seat under a tall palm-tree, and half unwillingly I placed myself beside her.

"There is some mistake!" I said, awkwardly enough, as soon as Letitia had disappeared. "I can't remember ever having seen you before, Mrs. Berrington. I know I shouldn't have forgotten it," I added, as a polite afterthought.

"Never?" she asked softly, with a lingering intonation of regret. "You never saw me before?"

"Never," I replied bluntly. "I'm sure of it."

"Look at me again!" she said, leaning suddenly forward, letting the light of a shaded lamp fall on her face; her dark eyes full of passion and mystery fixed on mine, her red lips tremulous with an unspoken appeal.

I don't know why I didn't make an utter fool of myself on the spot, and fall down and worship her. She certainly gave me an opening. As it was, I sat stolid and dumb from sheer intensity of tumultuous feeling, and she sank back with a hurt, dull look; and then—why, I could not imagine—suddenly twisted off a ring from her slender finger and sent it ringing and spinning over the marble floor. I sprang up and re-captured it; then almost dropped it again, as I recognised that evil-gleaming sparkle of green light lying in my hand. I gazed at it with an odd sort of fascination.

"Ah, you know *that!*" she breathed. "You cannot deny it."

"A curious stone. I have never seen one like it before," I said, affecting careless curiosity.

"I could tell you its name in Persian," she answered. "You have none in Europe. They are too costly."

"Is that possible?" I asked.

"They lose their lustre when sold for money. They can only change owners as free gifts. If they *are* to be bought, the price is *a man's life.*"

"Did *you* give that for it?" I asked, making a sickly little joke. She laughed musically.

"When this was put on my finger I was a baby-girl of five years old, as white and innocent as the little fawn that I used to play with amongst the roses by the fountain. It was nothing to me but one gem more amongst those I was loaded with, except that my mother sobbed and cried over me when she placed it on my finger and told me to keep it there till ——." She stopped short.

"Why, you could never wear *this*," I said. "It is too large for me."

"Try it," she replied: and I slipped it carelessly on the third finger of my left hand. The stone was set in a massive twist of silver with an inscription in some Eastern character running round it and round the finger. It slipped up and down easily.

"Now you may give it me again. It has never been off my finger," she added, an odd ring of excitement in her voice.

The wretched thing wouldn't stir. I tried and tried, twisted and turned, got hot and red, and looked inconceivably foolish; held my hand up, held it down, tugged, strained, and nearly dislocated the joint; to no purpose.

"Don't, *pray*," said Mrs. Berrington, in the sweetest, politest little society tone. "You will really do yourself some harm. Any jeweller will get it off. You can bring it when you call here next. You *will* call, I suppose?"

I saw Loxdale dodging about the entrance, evidently trying to attract my notice. I sprang up. "I'll try again," I said, vehemently.

"*Please* do not. It is not the slightest use. Keep the ring, if you like, for ever and a day," she drawled in the most indifferent manner; and when I stared, surprised, broke into a little ripple of malicious laughter.

"Good-night! Au revoir!" said she, and vanished.

"She's no good," enunciated Loxdale solemnly, between two puffs of a cigar, as we drove in the starlight under the arching elms of the Losthaven road. I kept silence, and he went on. "I can't make her out. Did you look at her cranium?"

"I hadn't the chance."

"Ideality enormous. Wonder ditto. Conscientiousness nil. She'd be a good spirit-medium if she were in that line. No more moral bumps than a kitten." Dead silence for the rest of the way till we pulled up at the barracks.

I said nothing to Loxdale about the ring, and in self-defence thought as little about it as I could. It fitted easily, and I was heavy with sleep when we reached home. The first hours of the night were a blank, dreamless void, and then suddenly out of the darkness flamed a million gleams of dull green fire around and above me—soft olive-green, each with an evil orange-tawny spark glowing at its heart; and a soft voice breathed in my ear, "At the price of a man's life. Is it too costly?" and I was constrained to stretch my hand out to seize one. Then the glowing lights changed to a woman's eyes—grey shining eyes—that sank into mine with an evil, intoxicating light. All sorts of mad, delirious fancies crowded through my brain; my heart throbbed wildly, sending the blood through my veins at fever speed. I tried to cry out, and in the effort woke, panting, breathless, and dizzy, with the ring pressed to my lips. Next moment I was knocking at Loxdale's door.

"Hallo?" said a sleepy voice.

"Loxdale! I want you. Just come in and bring your tools, will you?"

"All right!" was the answer, accompanied by sounds as of the striking of a light, and the shuffling into garments.

"What's the matter?" said he, appearing presently.

"Do you know any way of getting a ring off one's finger?"

"Half-a-dozen ways. Let me see, you put a cloth round it and pour boiling water——No, that's a decanter-stopper; but the principle is the same."

"Do your worst. This infernal thing is driving me wild with cramp or something."

"If it's to be done, I'll do it." And he didn't.

For hours that night we laboured. I was twisted up in silk, and unwound smartly—I was soaped, I was greased, I was steeped in cold water, I was bruised, skinned, grazed, screwed, and wrung; all to no purpose.

"I'll knock up the armourer! I'll stand it no longer!"

"Don't be a fool, Challinor. Take my advice. *Don't think of it.* That's the thing to do. Abstract your mind from it. It only requires a strong mental effort, and by to-morrow your finger will have regained its normal size, and we'll try again."

"So be it," I determined, and plunging desperately into bed, buried my face in the pillow. It was with an actual physical wrench that I drove myself into repeating over and over again some passages of the lectures which I had been getting up. I held my hand in a basin of cold water till at last the strain seemed to relax, and I slept.

We visited the local jeweller before his shutters were down next morning. He examined the ring and shook his head. "We haven't got the tools to do it, sir. It would spoil it utterly to file it off, and we could never mend it satisfactorily."

"But it *must* come off!" I exclaimed.

"We could send it to London," feebly suggested the man: but that being no practical aid to us, we departed.

I sent in an application for leave; unsuccessfully, of course. No chance of such a thing till Friday, and this was Wednesday. I went through the routine-drill, catechizing-lectures, all with a sort of dogged attention, feeling now and then on the brink of some outrageous blunder, and irritated beyond expression at catching Loxdale's sharp eyes fixed on me with an expression of inquisitive concern.

I grasped at his suggestion of a long country walk with "red-book" for the enlivenment thereof, though I felt wrath with him for selecting the one road from which no glimpse of the red-tiled roofs and quaintly-clustered chimneys of Wrencotes was visible.

Of the dreams of that night I shall say nothing; I don't care to recall them. I woke in the morning, conscious of nothing but some distracting influence that must be combated if I was to do my work to

any purpose. I liked the work, and a first-class certificate was of considerable importance to me. Dressing early, I made my way to the armourer.

"Get this ring off. Smash it all to pieces if you like, but get me rid of it."

The man gave sundry tentative nips and scrapes, and then said: "It's of no manner of use sir: it's platinum; that's what it is; or something that no tool we have here can work upon."

"Off it shall come, if I try dynamite." So I vowed in my wrath and despair.

The cursed thing fitted easily enough. It gave me no pain, and yet it weighed like a log on my hand, paralyzing it.

"No chance of the Section Prize!" growled Loxdale, more in sorrow than in anger, as we tramped back from the ranges through the pleasant briony-garlanded lanes that morning. "What *has* come to you, Challinor? I've seen some bad shooting in my time—or I thought so, till I saw yours just now ——"

He dropped the subject as too painful to pursue. And there was another night to live through.

After all, why not give way? What disgrace in falling under such soft enchantment? Better men than I had deemed "a man's life" a light price to pay for a woman's love. "And so should I," I thought, almost speaking aloud in my excitement, "in the real literal sense of the words. But I would give it freely, deliberately, and the woman should be worth it. But *this*—this is having one's brains, one's manhood conjured out of one by some unholy spell?" And all the dogged stubbornness of my nature set itself in array, backed by the force of that premonitive dream that haunted me still.

"Let's go over to Wrencotes," said Loxdale, unexpectedly, the next day. "We ought to leave cards there; and Mrs. Berrington will think it odd she has heard nothing of her ring."

It proved to be Miss Corless's "at home" day, and we found a large party assembled in her own special boudoir; a quaint cedar-panelled octagon room up aloft in a sort of tower. Four deep windows looked out to land and sea, and a smell of the pine woods came blowing in over the flowers with which they were filled. We were made welcome and supplied with tea by Letitia's own fair hands, but that was all the grace they were to do me this day. Her attention was another's. A fair pale youth, in a tight pale suit, sat at her elbow, and I was nowhere. I knew Mrs. Berrington was there, but dared not look at her at first. She sat in one of the windows, half screened by the lace curtains. She looked pale and worn; or was it the over-gorgeousness of her red tea-gown, stiff with Indian gold embroidery? Her great eyes had lost their lustre, and raised themselves languidly as I went near her.

"I am so sorry," I began hastily, "that I have not been able to return your ring."

She smiled faintly. "I am sure you are sorry, and did your best."

I told her my story.

"Never mind; there is no hurry. They are going to see the picture gallery; shall we come?"

A party of four or five, under the guidance of Miss Octavia, were on their way to the gallery, into which Miss Corless's room opened. We joined them. Ranks of by-gone Corless ancestors: beauties, heroes, statesmen, and otherwise (mostly otherwise) ranged themselves down one side of a long room, at the farther end of which a door, corresponding to the one by which we had entered, stood ajar. When we reached it Mrs. Berrington paused; then giving me a little smiling gesture of invitation, passed through, and I followed. Through a music-room, along a short passage, up steps and down steps, till we reached a queer little three-cornered room, gaily and tastefully furnished, looking straight across the valley to Losthaven.

"This is my den," she said. "Now I will show you some jewels worth looking at, but you must help me."

"To hear is to obey," I replied. "Is this what you want?"

I drew a mighty coffer from a recess—lift it I could not, and she opened it. It contained piles of morocco and velvet-covered cases. "Open them," she said carelessly, and I did so. Diamonds in rows, diamonds in clusters, diamonds in sparkling strings, stars, flowers, heavy flashing drops, more than I had ever handled in my life before, were tossed carelessly on the velvet-covered table as if they had been pebbles. Pearls that might have satisfied Lothair's cravings, ropes of milky lustre; sapphires uncut and roughly set; a girdle of priceless rubies.

"This is Aladdin's jewel-casket!" I said. "We shall come to the roc's egg at the bottom."

She passed her white fingers heedlessly through the glittering heap.

"I could show you some real curiosities if we had time, Mr. Challinor." Then, suddenly pushing them all away from her: "That ring is worth them all, and more, to me!"

I uttered some exclamation of vexation.

"Did you know how rich I am? My father married my mother for her wealth. My husband was an American millionaire, richer than he ever cared to find out. Now all is mine. Do you think I am going to give it to that foolish old man yonder?—my money and myself. Don't you think I could do better with both?"

"Very much better," I answered promptly. "You could take a German principality out of pawn, restore the Jews to Jerusalem, or buy up a South American republic with the money, and then—marry whomsoever you choose without it."

"Do you mean that?" she said, looking at me fixedly.

"Can I help you to replace these?" I asked, busying myself amongst the diamonds. "You shall have your ring back to-morrow evening, if any man in London can do it, I promise you. By Jove!

my time is up, if I am to catch the evening train! So till then, adieu."

She turned very pale, and her eyes gleamed angrily. "Just let me show you one thing more."

An easel stood near the window, and on it rested a blue velvet-covered case with a gold clasp. She unlocked it hastily, and threw it open. It contained a rough sketch in pastel, done many years ago; and I saw before me my own boyish face!

I stood amazed; and well I might. It was an unmistakable likeness—if my opinion is worth anything; and yet by what art magic could the Stuart Challinor of 1880 be taken in advance in 1875? The signature, "Henri Ledoux," was perfectly unknown to me. "Paris?" I had never been there in my life! And—why, I hadn't joined then; was in the fifth form at Harrow—yet there was the Manx Fusilier undress uniform and the forage cap with the badge, the Manx arms—which all the world knows are legs. I looked at it and then at her, utterly dumbfounded.

"Will you go *now?*" she asked softly; "or will you stay and hear my story?"

I could not choose but stay. And she went on:

"That was as I saw you seventeen years ago, and again last year. Do you not remember how you stood looking away so far, as if for someone, on the mountain-side, and the widening shadow of Corrig-na-gruin fell at your feet?"

"I remember. It was the only time I ever saw Castle Darcy; we had been early to the ranges, and I walked over the mountain, home. Were *you* there?"

"I was lying on the cushions of the women's apartment in a Persian house; my eyes blindfold with a scarf, every thread of which had been woven with a magic incantation, my head resting in the lap of an old woman, wise in many arts of which you Westerns know nothing. The air was full of the golden mist of scented drugs burning. I slept, lulled by some unknown words of power that she crooned to herself, her hands pressed on my lips and breath; and then I saw you, as I had done years and years before."

She stood in the full rays of the setting sun, her gorgeous dress ablaze in the warm glow, her face alight with intensity of feeling. How I hated myself for standing there dull and unresponsive; strangely drawn to her, yet strangely repelled.

"When had you ever seen me before?" I said, breaking a perilous silence.

"Oh, how well I remember it. I was dancing round the little bubbling fountain in our court-yard, tossing into it pebbles to make it talk, when I was called in from the sunshine to my mother's darkened room. Just enough light came in through the latticed panes of coloured glass for me to make out the figure of an old, old woman—I knew her well by sight—and my mother's sad face. Poor mother!

hers was a life of tears and woe, living widowed in her father's house, mourning her good-for-nothing husband as tenderly as such men usually have the luck to be mourned. Now she was going to send *me* from her, to the care of my father's people. She knew her life was nearly ended, and she longed to know her little daughter's fate. So there I stood, a bare-footed, half-clad, jewel-bedecked little creature, holding out my tiny henna-tipped fingers, while the old sorceress dropped the magic black liquid into my palm. Into it they bid me gaze, till out of the depth a face smiled back into mine—*yours*, as I see you now. I remember trying to describe it while the old crone grimaced and nodded, and my poor mother wept and wept over me. They put that ring on my finger then. It is a talisman, they say. It bound me to you for ever."

"And the late Colonel Berrington?" some mocking fiend suggested. I did not utter the words, I know, but she answered them directly.

"My marriage? That was but the means of escape. I hated the French convent where the Darcys placed me, and would have kept me, and let him take me away. He was more in love with me than I could understand. I told him I was yours, and yours only, and he made a jest of his shadowy rival; and when I saw that sketch in an artist's studio—a chance resemblance—he caused it to be finished from my description, and gave it me. He took me back to Tehrân to see my own people, and there—he died and left me free."

"Free, for you," that was what her eyes said. She stretched her hands to me like a child, imploring a caress, and then ——. The door opened briskly behind me, and Miss Octavia's voice was heard.

"Here you are! Pray forgive me for interrupting you, but Captain Loxdale is raging with impatience. I had to promise to send Mr. Challinor directly, to pacify him."

"I told you I was going to show Mr. Challinor my cameos: I thought you were all coming to see them," said Mrs. Berrington, with calm mendacity.

I caught my train after all, and in the seclusion of an empty compartment, tried to think quietly over the extraordinary story I had heard. Did I believe it? Well, scarcely. Could I utterly disbelieve it? Still harder to answer. If true, what then? She loved me; or a phantom me. Was I in love with her? No, a thousand times no; and yet the thought of her set my heart beating, my pulse tingling: the sound of her voice rang in my ears; the touch of her hand thrilled every nerve. Would I marry her? Again, no! emphatically. I didn't want to marry anyone. What *did* I want? A week ago I could have replied promptly. A first-class extra certificate to go out to India as Musketry Instructor to our battalion; then a chance of active service and speedy promotion; and then, when sufficiently be-medalled and starred to be worth looking at, the divinity at whose feet I could lay my distinctions might appropriately appear.

But now? "What the deuce can the woman see in me?" I protested in my bewilderment.—"Let me once get rid of this demoniacal fetter, and never will I willingly set eyes on her again."

That was the end of all my meditations; and they lasted till my arrival in London.

For all the good I did there, I might as well have stayed at Losthaven. Whatever the ring was made of, it resisted all attempts to cut or even indent it. The stone attracted much admiration and curiosity. It was unique; priceless. Saturday was spent in fruitless wanderings, and I returned on Sunday evening cast down and depressed.

I was late for mess; so, meeting my servant I sent him to see after some dinner, and went straight to my room. It was in darkness when I opened the door, but not empty, as I knew by the queer sixth sense to which no man has yet given a name.

A dark figure leant against the window-frame. I closed the door. It did not stir. I turned the key in the lock softly, and, calling out "Who's that?" struck a light. Then I saw Mrs. Berrington's pale face looking out of the gloom.

"I could not wait longer to learn the result of your journey. Don't be afraid. No one knows I am here."

"But, my dear Mrs. Berrington, of course I'm charmed to see you—but—how in the world are you to get home?"

"As I came," she laughed. "Well, am I to have the ring again, or are you to keep it till you die?"

She looked lovely, maddeningly lovely, in the shabby old cloak that was huddled round her. There was a ring of triumph in her voice, a saucy light in her eyes that made her tenfold more witching, and I felt a brute and a prig for replying:

"Forgive me, but you *must* not stay here. Loxdale—anyone—might come in, and—and—they would think it odd," I concluded lamely.

She only looked full at me, her eyes dancing, and a gleam of her white teeth showing through her red lips.

"Give me my ring, and I'll go," she laughed. But I was fairly exasperated by this time.

"I *can't* return it. You have guessed as much. I wish to heaven that I could; that I might never set eyes on it again."

She turned pale at my tone. "Do you hate me so much?" she whispered. "Why should you fight against Fate? It is yours, and you are mine." Her eyes dropped for an instant, then rose with a dangerous gleam under their curly fringes. "Yes, it is yours now, and there is the price to be paid—a man's life. You cannot refuse it."

"Can I not!" I retorted, every instinct of manly feeling in me roused to furious revolt. "See, here, how I can rid myself of its devilry."

I took up a sharp knife that lay on my table, and resting my hand on a book—the red book it happened to be—deliberately applied it

to the finger. She gazed at me in silence for a moment, then flew at me, tore the knife from my grasp, and threw it away, pressed my hand to her lips, and sank on her knees by my side, sobbing piteously.

"Oh, cruel! cruel! Why have I lived for you all these years? Why have I found you at last, if there is no answer in your heart to the longing in mine? Why can you not love me? What is my life worth now? Let me die here at your feet!"

I gently raised her, feeling utterly miserable; ashamed of myself and for her; heart-stricken by her grief and her beauty.

"See," she said, extending her hand. And there the ring lay; lay on the tiny palm. "I take it back; but while it lasts, and I live, it is *yours; and the price is owed to me.* I have waited for years for you. I can wait for years to come. Sooner or later you will pay me."

I looked my last at the gem's evil lustre. Involuntarily I closed my eyes to its luring light. In one moment a breath of cold air passed over me, and I looked shudderingly around to find myself alone.

Loxdale came in presently, and found me. I told him the whole story. I wanted the help of another man's mind to comprehend it. Loxdale stared, pondered, and looked perplexed: as well he might.

"It's a take-in from beginning to end!" he broke out at last, yet disbelieving his own excuse. "She knows you are next heir to the big Challinor property, and—excuse me—a bit of a romantic young softy: and she's got up the whole little drama—the hussy, with her big eyes and her bogus jewellery—and very nearly succeeded in hooking you, too!"

"Hold hard! I'm not the Challinor—no relation—only the same name; and her jewellery *wasn't* bogus—and you know it wasn't. Try again."

Loxdale *did* try again, and produced this result, which may stand as a moral, the only one that my story possesses.

"You are *young*, my boy, very *young*, with all your illusions fresh and unspoilt, and as much money as you can spend. The time *will* come: in about ten years, let us say: when you have discovered that a subaltern never *can* have money enough for his needs, and the Army Creed, that Providence has created rich women for the earthly reward of the deserving British officer, shall have penetrated into your soul. *Then* you will look back upon these mis-spent days at Lost-haven, and ask yourself, Which was the greater fool, I or she?"

"There are worse things in the world than being a fool, Loxdale," I said, and the discussion ended.

JEAN.

By A. de Grasse Stevens.

LITTLE Jean d'Orsay came into the studio one fine May evening, bringing with her a gleam of outside light, and the scent of violets.

"I have come for a long talk, Octavia," she said. "I have much to say, and you have much to listen to. Where is my old friend our home-made couch? Oh, there it is, pushed away back in that dark corner; Octavia, how could you treat my handiwork with so little dignity?" Then she pulled away with her pretty hands until the couch with its worn chintz covering and cushions was placed to her liking in the broad window, and she comfortably established thereon. The warm golden beams of the setting sun rested lovingly on her sweet face.

"And so, my dear," I said with a sigh of content, for I was very glad to have my Jean home once more, after an absence of many weeks: "you are really engaged to be married? I only heard the rumour, as true, the other day, and have waited for your own lips to tell me all about it, and as many of the secrets of love-making as you will confide to an old maid's keeping."

"Oh, yes, I am engaged," she answered carelessly; "but, Octavia, if you are pining for love secrets, I have none to tell. Surely you know as well as I do, that it was all arranged long ago, before papa died. It was his dearest wish that I should marry the Baron von Stock, and abroad we are taught to obey our fathers, even though they die and leave us; and even, without that, we d'Orsays never break our word."

She said this simply and as a matter of course, taking off her rings one by one and making a little row of them on the top of the couch. She was very young, only just seventeen, but there was a ring of proud truth in her voice that showed she had learned her lesson well.

"Yes, I know, child," I answered with another sigh, not so tranquil as my former one; "only, you see, I can neither understand nor believe in such a keeping of one's word. Here, in America, generally, a girl marries for one of two reasons: either because she loves, or because she is poor and needs a home. The latter can never be *your* case; then, Jean, do you *love* the Baron von Stock?"

Jean shrugged her shoulders. "He is fifty," she said, "and has grey hairs, and I am just seventeen, and, you know, summer and winter can never agree. But I am a d'Orsay."

"D'Orsay or not d'Orsay," I replied shortly, "I do not believe in any such nonsense. Jean, do you realise what you are giving up in marrying a man you do not love?"

"I think I do, Octavia."

"Is there then some one you do love, Jean?"

A long pause followed my question, during which Jean put on slowly the shining little circlets that belonged to her slim fingers. Then she said in a troubled voice: "Octavia, that is just what I have come to tell you."

A peremptory knock at the door, followed by the immediate entrance and familiar voice, of my particular favourite, Denis Durant, interrupted Jean's little confession.

"Are you here, Madame Octavia, all alone in the gloaming? And may I come in?"

"Come in and welcome, Denis, but when did you arrive? Your last letter said nothing of your intention to return so soon. You were on your way to Florida, then. Did you weary of the sunny South? Or were the Florida girls less winning and beautiful than you expected?"

"No and yes, Madame Octavia. As to the Florida girls, fortunately for me they did not make up my entire community, for I had other things to think about."

Denis crossed the long studio, and now stood beside us where we sat in the quick coming shadows. I turned to Jean to make them known to one another.

"Jean," I said, "this is your one rival in my affections; Denis, this is your only compeer in my heart."

I had proceeded thus far, when I was shaken out of my usual calm by a little gasping noise from amongst the cushions. Denis started forward, and to my utter dismay and astonishment, I saw him seize Jean's hands and cover them with eager kisses, while he said in a broken voice:

"*You* here, my darling! why I thought—I never knew you and Madame Octavia were friends."

Then Jean's frightened little voice:

"Oh, please, you must not.—Oh, Octavia, tell Mr. Durant all about it."

"Tell Mr. Durant all about it," I echoed; "indeed, I think it is you two should make explanation to me."

And so by degrees they told me. It was the same old story that is for ever and for ever repeating itself. They had met in Florida, gone sight-seeing and pleasure-seeking together until, as a foregone conclusion, they had come to love one another, and then—why then came Jean's summons home, followed by her formal betrothal to the Baron von Stock.

"She never let me know, Madame Octavia," said poor Denis, "where she was going, or why. Did she suppose I held her love so lightly won and so lightly lost? What if she is engaged to Baron von Stock, and bound by all the betrothals in Christendom, it doesn't matter in the least. No guardian can dispose of a girl that way in

this country. Jean, I tell you it shall not be. Don't you believe me, Jean?"

But Jean was sobbing quietly to herself, her face buried in her hands, only the soft dark fringe of hair upon her brow visible.

"Jean," I said at last, "surely there is no cause for all these tears. It is quite simple; what Denis says is more or less true; the Baron will never hold you unwillingly to your word. Be frank with him, my dear; it is always the best way to be honest."

"You do not know," she answered, lifting her tear-drenched face into the moonlight that now streamed in soft effulgence through the open window, "what it means to *us* to have plighted our troth. It is only a very little less binding than a marriage vow, and I, above all others, must not break mine; for, do you not know my dying father promised for me, and I may not soil his honour, though I might my own."

And from this we could not move her. Denis was in despair, and I not less moved, for I loved these two children dearly, and in my secret heart had cherished the hope that they might one day become something nearer and dearer than friends.

Jean sobbed on a little longer, while Denis held one unresisting hand, and the kindly shadows of the calm May night wrapped us all in soft obscurity. Presently there came the sound of wheels and the tramping of horses in the quiet street below, and then my little maid appeared with her lisping message:

"Baron von Stock was waiting for Miss d'Orsay."

So Jean dried her tears, put her hat over her dark ruffled hair, gave her hand calmly to Denis, kissed me hastily, and then we were left alone. The horses pranced below, and through the evening air came Jean's plaintive voice. Then the rolling wheels growing fainter in the distance, and then—silence.

"Denis," I said at length, "don't give her up."

"Don't give her up, Madame Octavia," he replied; "but what can I do? It is she that gives me up. What can I do?"

"Go to her guardian, Mr. Haviland, and tell him. If he has any remnant of youth left in his heart, he will try and help you."

This I said, not unmindful of Denis's good family, good looks, and his great wealth. He brightened somewhat at this suggestion and left me, later on, more willing to see some hope for the future.

I did not see either of my children for some days after that evening; indeed I think two weeks had gone by; but each day saw me so busily employed with my pupils and an amount of extra work, that I scarcely realised the flight of time.

One afternoon quite late, as I sat correcting a very much out of drawing study, Jean came in. I did not look up but welcomed her from my easel; she came across the room silently, and stood before me without speaking.

"Well, my dear," I said rubbing out a forearm with a bit of bread,

"it is a long time since you gladdened my eyes with a sight of your winsome face."

Then, as she did not answer, I looked up. She was standing directly in front of me, with the light from the north window full upon her. Her dress was a long, soft, white mull, with a breast-knot of dark Russian violets; she held her hat in her hand, and her soft dark hair lay slightly moist upon her forehead. But it was none of these accessories that drew from me the startled exclamation:

"Jean, what have you been doing to yourself?" For she was perfectly colourless with a pallor that betokened sleepless nights, and restless days, while all the tiny blue veins about her temples were plainly visible, and beneath her sweet eyes were dark purple shadows. She gave a little laugh.

"Oh, nothing, Octavia, unless breaking one's heart can be called an occupation. I have been doing that."

"Then you are very foolish," I said. "Why should you break your heart, and some one's else as well, when the remedy lies in your own hands?"

She made no answer at first, trifling in a nervous way with the feathers on her hat. Then in a troubled voice: "Is it Denis you mean, Octavia?"

"Who else should it be?" I answered. "Break your own heart if you will, child, but you might have spared my boy's."

I spoke quickly and in temper, but I grieved when I had said it. The girl started as if wounded, and gave a long, deep sigh, though she answered me quietly enough.

"Dear Madame Octavia, in deciding as I have, believe me, I have not spared myself; but I did not come to you to say so. I came because I am very miserable, and all alone, and because I am motherless; and to ask you to give him—Denis—this," laying a little note on the ledge of my easel. "And now I will say good-bye, Octavia." She left me before I could speak, with the same hurt look on her face, and all that remained was the white note for Denis, and one or two violets that had fallen from her dress as she moved away.

A few more days passed by, and Sunday morning, as I sat over my late tea and toast, the door opened, and Jean came in.

"Have you forgiven me, my dear?" I asked, as I kissed her sweet mouth, remembering my hard words a few evenings ago.

"Oh, indeed, Octavia, I had nothing to forgive. Surely if you may not speak your mind to me, who can? See, I have brought you these white lilacs, Octavia. Baron von Stock gave me such a large bunch of them yesterday, and at once I thought of you and the dear, dusty studio. You know I always used to keep the old place brightened up a bit."

Then, as she separated the fragrant white flowers and arranged them in my two majolica vases, she asked in a shy voice:

"Have you seen Denis, Octavia?"

"No, my little Jean; but I sent him your note."

"Did you read it, Octavia?"

"My dear, no. I noticed it was unsealed, but fancied that an oversight, so I fastened it up tight, and sent it on its way. You did not tell me to read it, Jean."

"It does not matter," she answered. Then after a little pause: "It was only to tell him, Octavia, that Baron von Stock and Mr. Haviland have decided *it* shall be on the fifteenth of June." I made no reply, though I knew it was her wedding-day she strove to speak of so calmly.

She came and rested her hands upon my shoulders.

"You do not answer me, Octavia. Are you then so indifferent?"

"My child," I said, "since you have decided in your own heart what is best, why should I reply?"

"Yes, that is true." Then, kissing me: "I have tried, Octavia, indeed I have, to do all for the best. I love Denis—ah, how truly I do love him—but my word is pledged. What can I do?"

"Nothing," I answered drily, "since you feel as you do."

And now it seemed to me the days fairly raced by in their eagerness to reach the fifteenth of June. I saw Denis frequently, Jean less often. The boy was overwhelmed with his first great sorrow. He would come and talk to me by the hour, tramping up and down the studio, rumpling up his fair hair, and repeating over and over how much he loved her—how cruel it all was.

"Why doesn't she tell Baron von Stock?" he said. "You don't suppose the man would force her to marry him against her will?"

"Why don't *you* tell him?" I answered.

"How can I do that? Can I go and tell the Baron that I feel sure Jean does not love him, and is only marrying him because of her father's stupid promise, and some absurd nonsense about the family honour? Don't her very actions give my words the lie direct? Didn't I tell it all to old Haviland, and much good did it do! He smiled at me as blandly as possible, and asked me if I came at Miss d'Orsay's request. Of course, I was obliged to say No. Then he smiled more blandly than before, and said, 'When Miss d'Orsay comes to me with the same petition, I will consider it.' Was there anything left for me to do, but take myself off, after that?"

No, I had to agree with him; there was nothing else left to do.

"Now listen," continued Denis. "You are fond of me, you know, and it will consequently give you pleasure to do me a good turn. Jean will not see me, and I must see her before the fifteenth. Won't you get her here next Sunday afternoon, and then let me come in quite by accident? You will, won't you?"

"Denis Durant," I said solemnly, "since you were a curly-headed boy, I have never refused you anything it was in my power to grant. Am I likely to do so now? Yes, you shall have one more chance. I will ask Jean to come. And now be off; my six young ladies

will be here in less than ten minutes, and I shall lose my reputation as a stern instructor, if they catch sight of your handsome face."

"Pass me off as your model," said he impudently; then, coming back and putting his yellow head down caressingly: "You will *make* her come, Octavia?"

"Yes, yes," I answered, touching his bright locks, "do not fear; you shall see her once more."

This was Wednesday, the fifth of June; in ten days Jean was to be married. I wrote her a note asking her to come to me on Sunday. She sent me word she would be with me at five o'clock in the afternoon; at six Baron von Stock would call to take her to dine at his sister's, where his relations were to meet her for the first time collectively.

Sunday came, one of those sudden intensely warm days, a foretaste of what July and August would prove. After my rather tardy luncheon, I drew the old chintz couch across the broad window, placed my low chair near, closed the venetian blinds, and waited for my lovers. Denis came first, putting in his head cautiously, and then advancing eagerly when he saw I was alone.

"Will she come, Octavia? Am I too late?"

"She will come," I answered, and even as I made reply, I heard her step upon the stairs. Denis drew back into the window, a moment, and then the door was slowly opened and Jean came in. She walked down the long room, and we two watched her as she came. She was already dressed for dinner, in a long, soft, white silk, made very simply, with some rich old lace at the throat, and short hanging sleeves. Her breast-knot was of her favourite dark Russian violets; her wavy brown hair knotted in some old-fashioned style, upon the top of her proud little head and held there by a quaint silver comb; in her hands she carried her white fan, and her long, white silk mittens. Save for the deep blue of the violets, there was not a ray of colour about her, and her face was as white as her gown.

I put out my hands to her as she drew near me; she took them in hers and bending kissed me twice. "You dear Octavia," she said, "how cool and calm and happy you look here. I never come that it does not do me good, and yet I always leave with a heartache. Are you glad to see me, Octavia?"

"My little Jean, I am very glad. You do not come so often now, my dear, and I miss you very much."

"It is not my fault that keeps me away, Octavia," she said using one of her pretty foreign idioms, "but my weakness. I dare not come, for every time I do, my courage waxes fainter. You and the old studio are so full of pleasant, dear memories, and—of—*him*."

"Jean, Jean, my darling!" cried Denis, coming forth from his hiding and taking both her hands in his.

"Are *you* here?" cried she. Then beginning to tremble a little, and in a low voice, with now and then a sob: "Oh, Denis, you should

not! Octavia, why did you let him come? Oh, my dear, dear Denis!"

It was all very, very sad. Jean stood there in her white gleaming dress, sobbing, with Denis holding her hands in his, entreating her, in passionate tones, to listen to the love in both their hearts.

"I cannot," she said, faintly. "Oh, Denis, I cannot."

"Then you do not love me," cried he, hotly.

"Love you," she answered. "Ah, you do not know how I love you. I love you more earnestly, more deeply, than it is possible for you to understand. But, oh! can't you see? it is not *my* promise I must keep, it is my father's. It will not greatly matter if my heart is broken," she added, a little wildly, "so our honour is kept clean."

For a few moments there was silence, then from out the gloom, far down the long studio, came a voice:

"Jean, mein liebling, art thou ready for me? Pardon, madame, that I intrude myself upon you."

Baron von Stock walked into our midst, and there was Jean, crying, and Denis holding both her hands.

"But what is this?" continued the Baron, turning his kind face from one to another. "Jean in tears! And you, sir," to Denis, "for what reason do you so hold Miss d'Orsay's hands?"

"For what reason?" cried Denis, glad to speak to some one in his excitement; "for the best of all reasons, Baron von Stock: because I love Jean, and she loves me. Don't you, my darling? Yes, I love her, and you will take her from me, because of some stupid promise long ago, made by a man dead these two years. You want her to marry you, and she is not one to break her word. But, look you: I tell you she loves me, and it will only be her hand she gives you, not her heart: that is *mine!*"

The boy finished almost triumphantly, though he dropped Jean's hands, and stood away from her. She said nothing.

"Is this true, Jean?" asked the Baron, slowly, with a look of pain on his face.

Thus questioned, Jean looked up and answered.

"True that I love Denis? Yes, it is quite true. I should have told you, Hermann, the day before our marriage, and I should also have told you, that as I took your name, so I should wear it blamelessly. You have never asked me, Baron von Stock, whether or no I *loved* you. You accepted my father's promise as I have done, as I am willing to do."

As I watched the Baron, I saw a sudden look of happiness come over his face while Jean was speaking. My heart sank. Was he then willing to take her not only without love, but knowing her heart belonged to another? It seemed so, for as she finished he went close to her, and, taking her hand, raised it courteously to his lips, bowing his grey head over it with infinite grace.

"That is quite as it should be, mein liebling; I am only too happy

to possess your amiable respect. And now shall we go? It is already late."

So with a general bow, and leading my poor little Jean by the hand, he left us. As the door closed, Denis gave one low cry and flung himself face down upon the couch. Nothing I could say would comfort him; he lay all the evening in dumb, wretched misery, while the dusk grew into night, and one by one out came the little stars, and last of all the full round moon.

The fifteenth of June dawned fair and cloudless. I was up early, too full of my child's new life that was to begin to-day, to rest. She was to be married at Mr. Haviland's, quietly, at six o'clock in the afternoon. I had a little note from her at mid-day begging me not to fail to come, and saying at the end: "Dear Octavia, I know I am doing right, although my heart seems dead. Baron von Stock is very kind, and says I shall soon be all bright and happy again. And, indeed, I shall try and make his words seem true."

By four o'clock I was dressed in my best grey silk, with a bunch of white lilac, that Jean had sent me. I was carefully drawing on my gloves and beginning to fidget mentally lest Denis should fail me at the last: for he, with a youthful desire to luxuriate in his grief, had declared it only manly and right to be at Jean's marriage, besides being his duty to look after me. At half-past five he made his appearance.

"Oh, Denis," I cried, "how glad I am to see you. I feared, after all, you might not come."

He laughed, a sad, bitter laugh, not good to hear from so young a heart. "You should not fear, Madame Octavia. If she can endure it, surely I can."

Then we betook ourselves to the carriage, and very soon were entering Mr. Haviland's drawing-rooms; these were gay with flowers, and sweet June sunshine, and bright with happy faces. Were ours the only heavy hearts in that small gathering?

We took our places, Denis and I, not far from the white satin mat richly embroidered in roses, which, as Madame de Vaux informed me, "had been brought especially from Germany for the bride and groom to stand upon. An old, old family custom, you know," she whispered energetically, "and *so* interesting."

We had not long to wait; there was a hush in the flow of many voices as Baron von Stock entered and took his place, followed immediately by Jean on Mr. Haviland's arm. I held my breath; Denis, who stood beside me, shivered. Very sweet and beautiful did my darling look, though her falling veil of rich lace could not hide from my eyes the real Jean beneath, and I noted with sharp anguish, that the sweet face was thinner, and the soft eyes more mournful, than one short month ago. In direct contrast to her sad, gentle looks, was the too apparent joy, not to say hilarity, of both Baron von Stock and Mr. Haviland. And now Jean had reached the silken mat, old

Mr. Dillon stood by in surplice and stole, and I was taking my last look at little Jean d'Orsay. She could be my Jean no longer. The Baroness von Stock could never come to the old, dim, dusty studio and make it bright with her presence, talking for hours over every trifling pleasure or pain, as the old Jean had done.

My eyes were full of tears, for Jean was the child of a widowed heart, that had never known the sound of the magical word mother. Even Denis's sorrow could not equal mine.

Baron von Stock's voice broke in upon my memories. "Mr. Haviland, and my very good friends," he was saying, "as you know, it was the earnest desire and solemn promise of my friend the late Count Alphonse d'Orsay, that there should, at a proper time, exist between me, Baron Hermann von Stock, and his only child and daughter, Jean Blanche d'Orsay, the tie and contract of marriage. And so great was this desire, however unworthy the recipient of his bounty, that he instilled into his daughter's generous heart, the feeling that should she break his solemnly pledged word, she would not only soil his honour, but that of the d'Orsays, whose race and lineage had never owned one member who had not kept it fair and clean. But to *me* he left discretionary powers, though he bound *her* so firmly, and should I, Hermann von Stock, desire at any time to cancel this mutual agreement, I was to be free to do so. *I do so desire now.* In the presence of you all, I give back to Mdlle. d'Orsay her freedom : not from any want of appreciation of her beauty, goodness and loyalty, rather because of them, and that I am an old man, and my love for her is too great to accept the sacrifice of her youth. Jean, mein liebling, look up. See I have brought thee a present, and we shall have a wedding after all."

When Jean raised her tear-dimmed eyes, it was Denis's face they rested on, Denis's hand that clasped so tightly her own.

"To you, my friend," said the Baron, more sternly, turning to the young man, "I say shield her faithfully ; she who guards so carefully a dead father's honour, will not fail to cherish that of her husband."

Denis bowed his bright head in silent thanksgiving. And so they were married.

Often now on summer evenings, the dim old studio is full of the joyous laughter and prattling tongues of little Denis and little Jean, pretty Blanche and baby Hermann. And when the shadows grow longer and the little spirits less buoyant, they gather about my knee and beg : "Once more, just once more, tell us the story of mamma's wedding-day."

MR. GRIMSHAW'S LOVE AFFAIR.

A SAVANT at work and a savant at play! What a different creature! Of the many who were accustomed to listen to him with deference and respect at various gatherings of the learned, how few would have recognised him now!

Mr. Theodore Grimshaw could never have been very young, I think. He was sixty-five at the date of this little narrative, and had friends as old as himself who maintained that in his school-days he was not in the least like a boy, and that in early manhood he was as little like other young men as could well be imagined.

Throughout his parchment-like existence Mr. Grimshaw had been absolutely impervious to the tender passion. His warmest feelings were those which he bestowed upon the future of Africa as a colony; while the interest he took in the Water Supply of his neighbourhood was stronger than any ever won from him by blue eyes or brown.

In the calm security of his wealth, noted ability, and dried-up temperament, Mr. Theodore Grimshaw went to dine one evening at the house of a married friend: an M. P. of expansive waistcoat and with an unconquerable conviction that the importance which attached to him in the rural district he had the honour of representing in Parliament was equally felt in London. As this gentleman kept an invaluable cook, and gave many dinners, no one interfered with his harmless delusion.

But the M. P. had a sister, and she was a widow. The widow was just under forty and in the full possession of much beauty; which—as the dear departed could no longer value it—she now desired should be a comfort to another. She thought Mr. Grimshaw looked lonely, and it was but a short time before she convinced him that he was so.

It seemed that in proportion to his former callousness Mr. Grimshaw was now to suffer the tortures of love. His fair one first attracted, then repelled him; and it was just three weeks after the dinner party at which they had first met, that the elderly gentleman by an effort of his mighty intellect pulled himself together and resolved to ask the momentous question. With extraordinary care he dressed himself, and was caught by his soft-stepping valet in the act of gracefully bowing and presenting a hair-brush to himself in the cheval glass! Could the astonished man have seen the choice bouquet with which his master afterwards ascended the steps of the M. P.'s house, he would have understood better why the hair-brush had been practised with.

The flowers were accepted gracefully; and, although suffering from such thumps of the heart as Africa had never given him, Mr. Grimshaw felt pleased at the glow of courage which inspired him, and fell to business.

"If I may hope——" he softly whispered, and the widow drooped her eyes, and blushed. She had long decided that his fortune and the carriage it would enable her to drive in, were worth a real blush. She yielded her plump hand, and returned the faintest pressure.

"My life shall be devoted ——"

"What remains of it," mentally corrected the widow, with a critical glance at the bald patch on her suitor's head.

"To your happiness," pursued Mr. Grimshaw.

The conversation then turned on place of residence. He had always lived in London: but—would she like the country better?

She would not have him change his habits for the world—country places were mostly damp. Yes, she adored flowers, but where were they so beautiful as in London?

Thus far all went well. Visions of a quiet residence where art should render everything as harmonious and beautiful as the home of such a woman should be, flitted deliriously through the brain of the happy Mr. Grimshaw, and with impassioned fervour he flung himself on his knees and implored the widow to name the day.

Silence, save for their own voices, had reigned supreme. Flowers bloomed in the balcony, sweet scents were wafted in by the gentle breeze of early summer, and, for the first time in his life, Mr. Grimshaw felt young. If he had only looked less withered, his ardent attitude might have moved a stone.

With gentle hesitation the widow listened, and would have speedily fixed an early day while praying for delay: but, in place of her dulcet accents, there rang out clear upon the silence a child's shrill voice from the adjoining room—only divided from this by heavy curtains, through which a pair of blue eyes peeped eagerly:

"Come, Nelly! Come and see the funny old gentleman saying his prayers to mamma!"

An electric battery could not have caused Mr. Grimshaw a greater shock! First his mortification that his most sacred privacy had been pried into; next, that terrible word "mamma!"

"You have children, then?" he inquired, in an aggrieved tone.

"Of course: everyone knows I have five!" announced, with some petulence, the fair widow.

"I did not know it, madam. It is altogether unfortunate—I—ah—can't bear children."

"Say no more, sir," loftily interrupted the injured lady, sweeping from the room.

All Mr. Grimshaw's friends can now recognise him again, and from his calm and uninterrupted interest in the Colonies to be established in Africa, and the Water Supply in London, the world reaps a rich harvest—or will, some day.

MINNIE DOUGLAS.

THE ARGOSY.

MARCH, 1883.

WINIFRED POWER.

CHAPTER VII.

WINIFRED.

TWENTY-FIVE years. It is a large span out of a lifetime; an age, seemingly, to look forward to or to look back upon. That period of time has nearly elapsed since the scenes recorded in our story, and the former chapters were but the prologue to what has now to come. Its thread is taken up in Paris; to which gay city we must carry the reader for a very brief sojourn.

Everybody who saw her for the first time was struck, not alone with Winifred Power's beauty, but also with her air of happiness. Not that she looked beaming, or facetious, or vacantly amused: nor was she perpetually laughing and talking. But she had an air of bright, resolute energy, which one instinctively felt could arise from no other source than a perfectly contented spirit. Her cordiality of manner; her fearless blue eyes; her quick blithe ways said plainly that in all her life she had given more of sympathy and help than she had needed.

Judgments, of course, differed about her as about everybody, but the majority of them were favourable. Among the weak, the poor, and the oppressed, indeed, Winifred counted a legion of friends. Not that people ever really disliked Winifred. Only some found her a little absolute, and others rather failed to understand her; and very sensitive, shallow, and vain persons thought occasionally that she had meant to affront them. Winifred was always dreadfully sorry when she discovered (which she did not always) that she had hurt anybody's feelings. But it is not certain that her sorrow was altogether conciliatory, for it had a slight mixture in its kindness of astonished, good-humoured, but faintly imperious scorn.

As a rule, it must be confessed Winifred had not very much time to trouble herself about people's feelings—as such. If they de-

manded consolation, sympathy, or active help (especially the latter), her energy indeed seemed as elastic as her leisure. But as long as those around her were satisfied, what she liked best of all was to have plenty of time for her painting.

For Miss Power was an artist, and no unsuccessful one for her years; and the sums produced by her painting counted for something in the not always abundant family finances. Winifred lived in Paris with her uncle, Mr. Russell, and his wife. Upon the second marriage of his widowed sister in India, Mrs. Power, to Captain Chandos-Fane, the Russells had adopted the little girl, Winifred. Latterly Mrs. Chandos-Fane, now a widow for the second time, had joined them in Paris.

The Russells had gone gradually down in the world. We last saw them at Marleyford in all the grandeur of their wedding-day. Ill-luck seemed to have tracked their footsteps. An heir, born unexpectedly, had deprived Walter Russell of his expected baronetcy. The failure of a bank had taken from him much of his own fortune. Ill-health had been his portion. And only a year or two ago, the treachery of a friend for whom he had been responsible involved him in difficulties. Then the fine apartment in the Rue Rivoli was given up for one in the Rue des Beaux Arts, a very different quarter. As compared with many of those around it, it was fairly handsome and commodious: and relics of their prosperity filled it: ormolu clocks, boule cabinets, and—Mrs. Russell's lamentations. She liked magnificence: costly dress, and a handsome carriage to make her calls in: and, in a degree, she had this still. Intensely selfish was she, as in the times gone by.

On this day, when we first make Winifred's acquaintance, the late March afternoon, drawing to its close, found her, as usual, busy at her easel. Sitting by the bright wood fire in a lounging chair was a lady, whom few would have guessed to be the young artist's mother. Mother and daughter indeed were both fair; but there the resemblance ceased. The girl was tall and bright and active-looking; the elder woman was petite and languishing.

The difference between them was the difference between a pure white statue and a Dresden-china shepherdess. Winifred, severely simple in attire, fair, flaxen-haired and beautiful, owed nothing to art. Mrs. Chandos-Fane, elegantly dressed and elaborately coiffée, was a manufactured article of remarkable prettiness. She was nursing a white Angora kitten and reading Baudelaire's poems. For she was æsthetic, and declared that her daughter's pictures were not always "interesting."

"That is the third time you have sighed, my love. You are overworking, I am sure," she presently remarked, in a cool, refined voice, laying down her book with a delicate yawn.

"I am not easily over-worked, mother; and the picture *must* be finished by next week."

"*Must!*" echoed Mrs. Fane. "There you have the fatal destiny of pot-boilers, my child. I have always told you, and I repeat, that you will never be a good artist until you have ceased to work for money."

"We must first cease to need money," answered Winifred rather brusquely.

"Ah, well!" exclaimed Mrs. Fane: and it was wonderful how the indefinite ejaculation conveyed by its tone that no problems were insoluble to persons of superior nature.

Winifred set her lips a little tightly, and an expression less of grave annoyance than of deliberate self-control for a moment clouded her bright young face.

"I am not sighing because I am fatigued," resumed she, after a pause; "but because my uncle is of late so manifestly worse."

"We must call up strength of mind to resign ourselves to the inevitable," replied Mrs. Fane, stroking the kitten's tail. "We cannot expect him to grow better, Winifred."

The door at this moment opened to admit a stout, cross-looking, yet elegant woman, who entered, dragging her fur mantle after her. It was Mrs. Russell. Handsome she undoubtedly was still: but few would have recognised her for the once beautiful Mary Hatherley.

"I am so tired!" she said fretfully, subsiding into the nearest chair. "The weather is quite mild to-day. What a fire! The room is suffocating," and she looked towards the closed windows.

"I find it cold indoors," remarked Mrs. Fane placidly; and she did not offer to let in any air.

"Is there no tea?" asked the new arrival, peevishly.

"I think there is a cup left," answered Winifred's mother, glancing carelessly at the little Japanese tea-service on a low table at her elbow.

"I am too tired to pour it out for myself," said Mrs. Russell.

Mrs. Fane put the kitten's paws round her neck and began talking to it softly. Winifred laid down her palette and brush and poured out the tea in silence.

"I have a piece of news for you," said her aunt to her as she took the cup. "Richard Dallas is dismissed from his employment."

"*No!*" Winifred stood in consternation.

"I always thought that would be the end of it," observed Mrs. Fane: who had never thought on the subject in any way.

"I drove there this afternoon," resumed Mrs. Russell, "and found them in great distress. I believe that the cause of his dismissal is some disgraceful discovery."

"Disgraceful to Dick? I don't believe it," exclaimed Winifred.

"Don't you, my love?" remarked her mother.

Winifred asked a string of eager questions, but Mrs. Russell was hopelessly vague. Naturally indolent now, her intelligence at this moment was additionally obscured by fatigue. She leaned back in a

condition of irritable somnolency, from which Mrs. Fane roused her at intervals by stirring up the fire.

Meanwhile, Winifred, as soon as her painting was brought to an end by the failing light, scraped her palette and thrust her brushes into water with unusual haste. The Dallases—an improvident, unfortunate family—were her great friends; and her affectionate imagination conjuring up vividly all that they must be at present enduring, she prepared to rush off to them with characteristic impetuosity.

All at once came a violent ring at the outer door, followed by the equally violent entrance of a young and very pretty girl, but by no means a good-tempered looking one. The puckered brow and angry eyes of this saucy, piquante brunette betrayed a disposition the reverse of mild, and, at this moment, apparently heated to explosion point.

"Oh, Gerty! I have heard the news," said Winifred, sorrowfully.

"Good evening, Miss Dallas," said Mrs. Chandos-Fane, icily reproving.

"What a noise!" exclaimed Mrs. Russell.

Undisturbed by these manifestations of various feeling, Miss Gertrude Dallas cast herself into an arm-chair, mutely irate, and began beating the floor with her pretty foot.

"I am so distressed," whispered Winifred.

Gertrude shrugged her shoulders cynically. "It is just our luck," she answered.

"Can nothing be done?"

"A great deal. But we, my dear Winifred, are not the people to do it." Having delivered this remark, in a tone of bitter sarcasm, Miss Dallas folded her hands, fixed her eyes on a corner of the ceiling, and resumed her tattoo.

"Would you kindly explain what has happened?" asked Mrs. Fane.

That was soon done. Richard Dallas, Gertrude's half-brother, older than herself, and born of a French mother, had, through the interest of his maternal relatives, obtained a post as sub-curator to a provincial museum in France. The appointment, as conferred on a half-foreigner, had always excited some jealousy, and Richard had never hit it off with his immediate superior. Lately, some valuable Syracusan coins were discovered to be missing. The loss was probably of old date, the museum being very carelessly managed. But it had only been now found out: a scapegoat was needed: and personal spite found a vent in the choice of Richard Dallas.

"That is just the whole story," said Gertrude, bringing her curt narrative to a conclusion.

"How disgraceful!" breathed Winifred.

"Very *unfortunate*," observed Mrs. Fane politely, with a slight stress on the adjective, that brought an embarrassed blush to her daughter's cheeks and an angry stare to Gertrude's eyes.

"Dick is only the victim," affirmed the latter, as if in answer to

an unspoken accusation. "It is the head-curator who is to blame. The municipality should be written to; the government memorialised; the ——"

"Who says all this should be done?" interposed Winifred, quietly.

"*I* say so," flashed out the other, angrily.

"Was it a sweet, white, soft, beautiful, *beautiful* kittensy, and did it never have to memorialise anybody, except its mistress for a wee-wee saucer of milk?" lightly chaunted Mrs. Fane, tilting the Angora up on its hind legs and looking at it with a fascinating smile.

Gertrude sprang up; the indifference irritated her beyond control. "I am going, Winifred."

"No, you are not," returned Winifred with gentle authority, taking her two hands and forcing her back into her chair again. "You are to stay with me and be in some sort comforted, you poor child. Only you are to try and talk a little practical sense, for our behoof as well as for your own."

"What practical sense can I talk?" flamed out Gertrude. "Of what use can I be? Am I not a cipher, a nonentity; in other words, a young lady? Lady, forsooth! Much good there is in being that, when one must toil and grind from morning to night like—like a crossing-sweeper. And everybody the while to cry 'Peace,' where there is no peace, and to preach patience when patience is only a cloak for incapacity."

"How very magnificent! Where did you learn all that?" laughingly retorted Winifred, her sense of fun getting momentarily the upper hand of her compassion. But Gertrude was tragic: in the presence of that eloquent kitten she had no resource but to be earnest. To be anything less was to be ridiculous: and ridicule was the one thing that Gertrude Dallas most feared on earth.

"It is very well for *you* to talk," she answered sulkily. "Who ever interferes with you?"

"A difficult question to answer," remarked Mrs. Russell.

"Yes, indeed. Our dear Winny rules us all," spoke the mother.

Winifred looked down, but said nothing. She was as little given to self-pity as to self-praise; nevertheless at this moment a vague revolt against injustice stirred faintly within her. The thousand small sacrifices of herself to which she owed her ascendancy—who was there to appreciate them?

"There it is," pursued Gertrude triumphantly. "Winifred can do as she pleases. You can make use of your talents; work unhampered ——"

"But surely you could work also, if you liked?" interposed Mrs. Fane, with an innocent air of seeking for information.

"Yes, as a governess," replied Miss Dallas scornfully, turning a dusky red in her exasperation.

This governess question was a very sore point: as she had tried the career and ignominiously failed. Of course, through no fault of her

own: when were the Gertrude Dallases of this world anything but the victims of adverse circumstances?

"I could spend my youth shut up in a stuffy schoolroom with detestable children of wooden intelligence—I could do that, of course," pursued the young lady, with magnificent contempt. "Or I could sweep a crossing, or go about with a basket selling pins and staylaces, or—in fact there is no end to the occupations which I might find if I *chose*." The accent on the last word was withering.

"Some governesses get a hundred a year," put in Mrs. Russell.

"Very probably. In some eyes, doubtless, a human machine is priceless," retorted Gertrude, with defiance.

"Are not *you* priceless?" exclaimed Mrs. Fane to the kitten, which put out one velvet paw and tapped her on the cheek.

"Good evening," said Gertrude abruptly; and she rose, pale with annoyance, and left the room. Winifred went with her to the stairs and took leave of her sorrowfully, promising to come as soon as dinner was over.

"We shall be glad to see you, of course," replied her friend not very graciously. "But I am afraid you will not find us very lively company," she added, and ran lightly down the stairs.

"What you can see to like in that ill-tempered girl passes my comprehension, Winifred," remarked Mrs. Fane.

"All Winifred's friends are eccentric," said Mrs. Russell plaintively.

"Wait until you have seen Mademoiselle Marthe!" laughed Winifred. "Then indeed you may talk of eccentricity."

"You are always threatening us with that person," exclaimed Mrs. Fane. "Who *is* she?—and when is she definitely to appear?"

"When I have succeeded in vanquishing her shyness," replied Winifred, "and I can't do that yet."

"I am sure you had much better leave her alone," observed Mrs. Russell. "It is too Quixotic to consider yourself bound by ties of eternal gratitude to a queer, probably vulgar old woman, just because she happened to show you a little attention when you were ill."

"She nursed me with the greatest devotion, and she is not vulgar," retorted the girl.

After dinner, Winifred prepared to start, her maid, Sophie, in attendance, for the Rue Ste. Catherine, where the Dallases dwelt. But before leaving, she tapped at a door at the end of the corridor. "Come in," said a voice, and Winifred entered her uncle's bed-room. A pleasant room, although it was the home of an invalid, and although its denizen knew no change but the slow advance of a mortal malady, and no variety but such as consists in spending one's bad days in bed and one's better ones on a sofa.

"Ah, my Brunhilda! Whither away?" said Walter Russell, looking up from the review he was reading by the light of a shaded lamp. The name—given her playfully in allusion to her fair, tall beauty—

and the tone in which it was pronounced, spoke volumes for the cordial friendship, deeper than mere relationship, which reigned between the sick man and the girl.

"I am sorry I shall not be here to read to you this evening," said Winifred, seating herself beside her uncle's couch; "but I must go to the poor Dallases. You have heard of their fresh misfortune?"

"Yes, poor things! Fate has a spite against them, as it always has against the feckless: if, indeed one should not rather say that the feckless have a spite against fate," added Mr. Russell with the half-wistful smile of a man whom evil fortune has made a philosopher.

"Now, what is the meaning of that? Something cynical, I am sure." And Winifred shook her golden head reprovingly.

"Only as Nature is cynical, my child. The feckless are clearly intended by natural laws to sink; yet the Winifreds of this world, with a great expenditure of energy and pity, persist in helping to keep them afloat."

"You know those are the things I don't like you to say, Uncle Walter. And I believe that one day the Dallases will find out how to help themselves."

"You believe that? Then you have a great deal of faith."

"Are you better to-night?" She took his wasted hand tenderly as she asked the question, and bent down to look into his face with anxious, loving eyes.

"I am better," he said, "for I am nearer the goal. Nay, do not look so sad, child. You are very good to grieve for me; but glance beyond your loving regrets and ask yourself what I have to live for."

"For your friends," murmured Winifred. Yet even as she said the words, even as she drew the noble, grey head to her and laid her soft, young cheek upon the massive forehead, regret for a moment died down in her, quenched by self-forgetful pity. Her uncle had been all in all to her. The books that she had read with him gained an added significance from his comments; and his intellectual companionship had educated her as no books alone could have done. Yet, above the passionate longing of her love and her youth and her strength to keep him with her always, rose the sympathetic comprehension of his sorrows. Of how little books and the love of friends, the voice of pity and the touch of tending hands, can be to a man who, stricken now with physical helplessness, and embittered with the sense of failure, looks back along the traversed track of life, and sees his baffled efforts standing phantom-like with regretful eyes of pain! Keeping back resolutely an unwonted rush of tears, Winifred pressed her lips upon the sick man's brow, and in that kiss, for that moment resigned him almost gladly—*almost!*—to the peace and silence of the tomb.

"Go—and come back quickly," he said. "And perhaps there may still be time for you to read me a page or two of our book. Your touch

must be magnetic, Winifred. Something that you meant that kiss to say to me seems to have done me good."

She did not find much to say in answer to that, but left him, promising to make haste. On her way down stairs she met Claire, the young flower-maker, who lived two stories above her, and who was helping her blind grandfather to climb the steep flights.

"Bon soir, mam'zelle," simultaneously said the girl's fresh tones and the old man's quavering treble, as they became aware of Winifred's presence. They were neighbours, these two girls, and had come to like one another much, although their intercourse was principally limited to nods from their respective windows, and the one was a young gentlewoman, and the other but a poor seamstress. Claire, sitting at her work in her humble room, could look down into Winifred's studio. Sometimes the young artist, brush in hand, would appear at the window, just for the sake of throwing a bright smile of greeting upwards. And often, in the early morning, for both rose with the lark, Winifred would be hanging out her canaries just as Claire appeared at her own casement with her blackbird. And Winifred declared that this same blackbird had been the source of much inspiration to her. For its first liquid notes echoing through the court seemed to be the herald of the spring. Then many an aching head and a flushed, weary face was lifted from its occupation of needlework, or watch-making, or copying. Windows were thrown open, just through the infe tion of gladness, and those condemned to stifling rooms and imperfect light through the dreary winter days, knew that soon the first tender shoots of green would brighten the town gardens, and the Marché aux Fleurs be fragrant with violets—not forced in hothouses, but gathered in the woods! It was these homely touches, reminders of the poetry of poverty and the holiness of work, which made her life in Paris dear to Winifred.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DALLASES.

Mr. Dallas, the unfortunate Richard's father, was one of those charming people who make everybody uncomfortable, and are universally adored. He was a perplexing unknown quantity in the lives even of his nearest and dearest: a fantastic element, with which they could never cope, and constantly disappointing expectation.

There was never any telling what Mr. Dallas might do next—except fail. For fail, he invariably did, in whatever he undertook. It was a brilliant kind of failure often, for he had plenty of talent. But the results, when they came to be inspected, were none the less dismal for having had a sort of phosphorescent splendour. He was a painter, a musician, a poet, and had produced creditable, albeit unfinished work in all lines. Only, through some queer perversity of

nature, he never produced it when wanted. If a picture were ordered of him, he set about composing a poem. If an editor (by some unheard-of stroke of good luck) were found to consent to read a poem, Mr. Dallas would discover that he had nothing good enough to show him : he would promise something better, and meanwhile, set to work on a song. Such industry as he had, and, to do him justice, he was rarely idle, seemed to recoil from the task appointed to it.

For the rest, Mr. Dallas had all the facile grace of his temperament and fascinated everyone. If nobody on a closer acquaintance entirely believed in him, on the other hand nobody ever entirely disbelieved in him. The most sober-minded and the most hardworking of his acquaintance had an infinite patience with him ; and, perpetually helped by their efforts above the immediate consequences of his own imprudence, he looked down with the smiling serenity of an all-unconscious self-complacency upon the toilers who supplied his wants.

"I am so glad to see you, dear," said kind-hearted, short-sighted Mrs. Dallas, receiving Winifred with open arms. "You have heard of our sad trouble. Take off your hat and have some tea."

The good little woman's fetish (for all divinity had long vanished from the idol) bore the sweet name of "home." Only, "home" with her meant really dining at one o'clock and having raspberry jam at tea. That was a delicacy which had soothed her children's angry tempers when they were little : she could not conceive that it should fail in a similar effect now that they were big. Their aberrations perplexed her, as all aberrations did equally, from house-breaking to undarned socks, but when she beheld them gathered round the hissing urn the evidence of their discontented countenances never availed to convince her that peace did not reign in their hearts.

"I have just dined, but I will take a cup," replied Winifred, knowing that to refuse was to break her hostess's heart. "Where is Dick ?"

"Gone out for a little stroll, poor boy : but he will be home to tea," said Mrs. Dallas, cheerfully. "Mr. Dallas is in his studio, hard at work. He has had an order to paint Monsieur and Madame Dubreuil's portraits ; they are to be finished in a month, for their daughter's birthday."

"And is he painting them by lamplight ?" asked Winifred, in great astonishment, yet pleased at the news.

"He is preparing some etching-plates, and starts on an etching tour to-morrow," explained Gertrude, with a kind of sulky irony.

"Poor papa ! He is always so busy," remarked simple Mrs. Dallas.

"He might be busy to better purpose just now, mamma."

"Your papa knows his own affairs best, you may be sure, my dear." The little air of matronly dignity with which this reproof was administered, and its own intrinsic, affectionate imbecility, secretly exasperated Gertrude. But for once she subsided into silence, after no stronger protest than an expressive toss.

"Well, what are you all about? Is tea not ready? Ah! Good-evening, Miss Winifred!" said Mr. Dallas, rubbing his hands with the bearing of a man who has achieved a task and is pleased with it.

"We are waiting for poor Dick," said Mrs. Dallas.

"Wait for no one. Punctuality is the essence of success. There is no defect for which I have so profound a contempt as unpunctuality," observed he, turning towards Winifred.

This in the presence of a domestic calamity would have astonished Winifred, could anything in Mr. Dallas have astonished her. As it was, she only said gravely, "I came to condole with you about Richard."

"Ah, Richard! Poor lad!" Regret clouded the father's open, handsome countenance. "He has been infamously treated, Miss Power. Infamously. I have written out a petition. Perhaps a better plan would be to horsewhip the curator? I think I will go to Blois to do it. By Jove! I will start to-morrow," wound up Mr. Dallas, struck with the sudden idea.

"And your etching?" suggested Gertrude.

"The etching be hanged! it can wait," replied her father, with serenity. "Here's Richard. We were going to begin tea without you, my boy; you are five minutes late."

Richard, a dark, slender, and attractive young man, came forward and shook hands with Winifred in silence. He was looking sad and pale.

"I am so sorry for you," she murmured.

"I am sorry for myself, but there is little help in that," he said, glancing at her gratefully. "I suppose I am fated to go to the wall."

Gertrude, curled up in an arm-chair, here gave a derisive laugh. "We are always going to the wall, all of us. In fact, we live in an impasse," she observed amiably.

"In the absence of more effectual effort, my child, you can continue to console yourself by making epigrammatic remarks," said Mr. Dallas, not well pleased.

Gertrude looked furious; she hated reproof. But in any war of words with her father, she knew that she was always beaten, though she had inherited much of his caustic wit.

"Where is the cosy?" inquired of the world at large Mrs. Dallas, peering about painfully.

"It was left in the drawing-room. Georgie, go and fetch it," commanded Gertrude of her younger sister, a lanky maiden of fifteen.

"Go yourself!" retorted Georgie, who was nursing a splendid cat, the mother of Mrs. Chandos-Fane's kitten.

Enraged to activity, Gertrude sprang up and made a dart at the rebel. Georgie ducked; the cat bounded: Mrs. Dallas's key-basket was upset, and its contents were scattered upon the floor. She stooped to collect them, caught a corner of the table-cover, and some of the cups fell with a crash to the ground.

"Gertrude!" cried Mr. Dallas, turning his anger upon her. "Go to your room, and stay there."

"*I!*" Gertrude exclaimed. "I?"

"*You*," replied her father. "When you are by, there is neither peace nor quiet of late; neither decent behaviour nor civil speech."

The girl stood for one moment transfixed with amazement and a bewildering sense of wrong. Then, as an ill-timed and triumphant giggle from the appeased Georgie met her ear, she turned and rushed away, banging the door behind her.

Winifred made a movement to follow her, but Mr. Dallas interposed. "Let her be, for Heaven's sake," he said. "But that insanity is unknown in our family, I should really tremble sometimes for that child's future reason. Her storms of passion are unbearable."

Poor Mrs. Dallas, with trembling hands, and murmuring that *this* time it was not Gertrude who was in fault, restored something like order to the tea-table, rang the hand-bell for fresh cups, and invited everybody to sit down. She crept away presently with Gertrude's tea to the culprit's room, but returned in a grieved way, shaking her head. The door was locked, and she had been denied admittance.

Except by herself and Winifred, Gertrude was not missed. Mr. Dallas himself was in delightful spirits. He always was thus in the presence of family misfortune; that was one of his peculiarities. He even rallied Richard, who sat abstracted and silent, and launched out into brilliant disquisitions on things in general, and all that he intended to do with them.

Tea over, Winifred rose to go. "I will call Gerty. She would be so sorry not to say good-bye to you," said Mrs. Dallas, eagerly.

Winifred knew that the goings and comings of the entire world were at this moment matters of supreme indifference to the indignant Gertrude. But too good-natured to contradict, she waited.

Mrs. Dallas returned, looking disturbed. "Gertrude's room is empty," she cried. "She must have gone out."

"Alone? and at this hour!" exclaimed Mr. Dallas.

"Well, I cannot find her."

Gertrude had slipt out unobserved. Hortense, the servant, and Winifred's own maid, in high converse in the kitchen, had heard the outer door close softly, but did not know who had gone out: had thought it was one of the gentlemen.

"I expect she has only gone to the Bonnards'," suggested the mother, the Bonnards being great friends of Gertrude's.

"But she ought not to go at this hour," said Mr. Dallas. Presently the bell tinkled, and "Here she is!" they exclaimed. However it was not Gertrude, but a note from her to her mother, brought by a commissionaire, who said there was no answer.

Mrs. Dallas opened the note; then stood up scared and speechless. Richard took it from her.

"Read it out," said Mr. Dallas to his son: and he obeyed.

"I relieve of my presence a home where, by your own confession, my part is that of a firebrand. Domestic life being, so far as I am concerned, a failure, I intend in future to live away from you. Before this reaches you I shall have left Paris. Do not try to find me. It will be useless.—Gertrude."

Horror-stricken, they looked at one another. Then Richard rushed away to overtake, if possible, the commissionaire, and Mrs. Dallas and Georgie began to cry. Winifred sat dumb; Mr. Dallas walked up and down the room. He was less frightened than angry: such a proceeding as this of his daughter's grated, he would have told you, on his fine sense of order.

When Richard returned, breathless, he had failed to find the messenger. Mrs. Dallas felt quite sure that the only people to apply to were the Bonnards, that Gertrude had gone to them, and Richard again departed. He came back, again unsuccessful, but bringing with him the astonished and dismayed Monsieur Bonnard. He, bald-headed and decorated, a respectable and kind-hearted Frenchman, was quite overcome at Richard's news, and had arrived to offer his services.

"They had not seen Mademoiselle Gertrude for some days," he said. "He was quite sure she had not been even for a moment at their house that evening. Their only visitor had been Lieutenant Valéry, who had called to take leave."

"Lieutenant Valéry!" exclaimed Hortense, who, French servant-like, had come in to listen. "Was he an infantry officer, Monsieur? A little young man with a reddish moustache, and black bright eyes?"

"Mais oui; mais oui—" that described him exactly.

"Then Mam'zelle Gertrude has run away with him," Hortense boldly declared.

Mr. Dallas uttered an exclamation of incredulous anger; Monsieur Bonnard one of horror; Mrs. Dallas breathed a sigh of relief. *Her* simple mind immediately conjured up a romantic love-story, tears, forgiveness, blessings, a trousseau and general happiness. The men, more alive to practical difficulties, took a different view.

"Run away with him!" indignantly repeated Mr. Dallas. "How dare you say so, woman? Who is the fellow, Bonnard? I never heard of him before."

"He visits at our house. I am afraid your daughter has met him on occasions there," groaned Monsieur Bonnard.

"All I know is, they meet in the street sometimes; the other day, when I was out with Mam'zelle Gertrude, they had a long conversation," affirmed Hortense.

"We must go after them," exclaimed Mr. Dallas, starting up. "Dick, you come with me. Where is this Valéry to be heard of, Bonnard?"

"He starts to-night for Lyons, on leave, mon ami"—and the

kind-hearted old Frenchman, looking deeply concerned, took the agitated father aside. "A French officer of that rank cannot marry unless he deposits 25,000 frs. at the Ministry of War. Valéry has not a sou."

Mr. Dallas looked at him with scared eyes, hardly understanding. The vivid colour, which excitement had brought to his face, slowly receded.

"The chief point is to pursue them as quickly as possible," urged Monsieur Bonnard, pressing his hand.

Ten minutes later Mr. Dallas and Richard had left the house, taking with them all the money they could scrape together. They were accompanied to the station by Monsieur Bonnard.

But on arriving there they found they had just missed the Lyons night express by five minutes; and they had, in consequence, no choice but to wait with such patience as they could until morning. Part of the night was spent in making inquiries; and they were able to establish with tolerable certainty that a young couple, answering to the description of the fugitives, had indeed started by the express.

Winifred meanwhile had lingered a few minutes with the idea of comforting Mrs. Dallas. But to her surprise the little woman needed but slight consolation.

"Poor dear Gerty, she has been rather headstrong at times of late. Perhaps you may have noticed it?"

Winifred, who had never noticed anything else in all the years of her acquaintance with her friend, murmured a vague assent.

"It often puzzled me," pursued Mrs. Dallas placidly, "puzzled and pained me. But now it is quite explained. The poor child had this love-affair in her head. If she would only have placed confidence in me, I might have made it all smooth with her dear papa."

This new view of Mrs. Dallas, as a person of influence in her own family, severely tried Winifred's gravity. But the unconscious pathos of it touched her also.

She went home with a heavy heart. Even while hoping for the best, she had ten times Mrs. Dallas's knowledge and experience, and was proportionately removed from the possibility of taking the same sanguine view. And quick of sympathy always, she was more than ever disposed to grieve where Gertrude was concerned. The two girls had been friends from childhood, and Winifred loved the wayward nature that was so far beneath her own. She made excuses for Gertrude's violent temper, and exalted the fitful generosity which at times redeemed it. For, of all the many illusions of life, what spell is more potent while it lasts, more irrecoverable when it has vanished, than the tender glamour of early friendship? Half-way down the hill of life we look backwards along sunny meads, and onwards into gloom. Above us, there on the flowery slope, appears a radiant form: is it our youth? Is it our early friend? Before we

know, the gracious phantom has vanished; and, beckoning down the rugged path, stands the austere, veiled maiden called Duty.

Two or three days of suspense ensued, during which the story of the flight oozed out, and raised a great hubbub round poor Gertrude's name. Then Mr. Dallas wrote briefly to say that he had found his daughter, and would soon be returning.

"With her, of course," said Mrs. Dallas. "Dear papa! I wonder if we shall like the poor young man." She pitied Lieutenant Valéry without exactly knowing why. Probably she pictured him to herself as tremendously in love.

When Mr. Dallas and his son appeared, however, they had a very unexpected story to tell.

Gertrude had run away with the young man not out of love, but from sheer recklessness. Smarting under her father's reproaches and under the fancied wrongs of years, so exaggerated in her imagination just then, she had quitted her home with the intention of taking refuge in the first instance with the Bonnards. Further than this she did not know what she should do, and perhaps in her excitement did not care. The Bonnards might want to force her back to her home. Such a prospect filled her with fury and despair.

In front of the Bonnards' house she had run up against Valéry, who was leaving it. She had met him several times, and her haughty vanity had been gratified by his evident admiration. In a world which did not appreciate her, even the homage of a French lieutenant of foot was a drop of comfort.

He stopped in much amazement at seeing her alone at such an hour, not putting the best construction on it.

Her confused, passionate answers to his questions only increased his doubts, but he listened to her with that curious mixture of incredulity and pity which a man of his stamp accords to a woman's narrative of her wrongs. To make a long story short, he presently proposed to her, perhaps three parts in jest, to accompany him to Lyons. Impelled by some demon of crazy recklessness, she accepted the invitation.

She took a savage pleasure in compromising herself in the eyes of her family, and of consequences she had at the moment but a very confused impression. In her inexperience and her arrogance she believed she could keep herself perfectly straight, and defy the world.

The alarm, the angry disappointment of her awakening, constituted the bitterest, because the first *real*, lesson of her life. A very few hours of Lieutenant Valéry's society sufficed to fill her with detestation for him; and she no sooner found herself in Lyons than she ran away for the second time, leaving her companion extremely astonished and aggrieved—feelings later considerably aggravated by the horse-whipping inflicted on him by Mr. Dallas, and for which that gentleman refused him satisfaction.

As for Gertrude herself, the state of repentant excitement in which

her father found her was pitiable. She would not hear of marrying Valéry: even before the horse-whipping, and supposing that he had desired it. She would not hear of returning home. She supposed her character was damaged, she informed them, folks were so ill-natured, but her people themselves were to blame. She reproached her father, her brother, everybody: and poor Dick had ever been a good brother to her. She wept, she stormed, she was tragic and pathetic, simply by force of her mental perversity. The strength of her conviction, that she was a victim, was a rock on which all argument broke.

"I must make shipwreck of my life now in any case. Yes, I *choose* to do it. Let me take my own way," she reiterated: and Mr. Dallas, worn out by anxiety and anger, fairly succumbed at last to her violence. Her plan was to go to Turin as teacher in a school. She knew of such an opening, as it chanced, and might as well begin her series of failures there as anywhere else. So Richard was sent to escort her to Turin, and Mr. Dallas returned to Paris alone.

The exact truth, about Gertrude's flight, her family naturally never told. Neither the Bonnards nor Winifred learnt whether Hortense's suggestion of an elopement had turned out to be correct. Nobody ever asked now for Gertrude; and her name ceased to be mentioned.

Only Mrs. Dallas, when alone with Winifred, sometimes would drop her head upon the girl's shoulder and weep silent tears of disappointment and despair.

CHAPTER IX.

MADEMOISELLE MARTHE.

Mrs. Russell, as we know, complained that Winifred's friends were generally eccentric. And certainly the one about whose eccentricity there could be no doubt was Mademoiselle Marthe.

She was not French, but very English. Nevertheless, the very few friends she had, belonged to the country of her adoption, and none of them called her by her surname, or thought of asking what it might be. She was *the* Mademoiselle Marthe par excellence of the quartier. No one, before or since, had ever been seen like her. She had a tiny, wizened body, a small, puckered face, and a still, half-scared manner which contrasted strangely with her wistful eyes. Something there was so very human about her that, looking well at her, you felt inexplicably compassionate and attracted. But any advance was chilled by her unconquerable and painful reserve. "She is like a caged and frightened fawn;" "She looks as if she had once been told a ghastly secret, and never forgotten it," were the various phrases by which people strove to explain the odd impression which she made upon them.

And, because she was incomprehensible, she was, on the whole, more feared than thoroughly pitied. Her pride, combined with her deadly poverty, made the weak-minded a little resentful of her; and she sometimes excited the evil fear of the malignant by sudden flashes of clear perception and brief assertions of principle. Her usual manner half frightened and very depressed, gave place at moments to a pathetic excitability. Something in her, long repressed, seemed at times to rise in revolt against her sad and anguished life, and sting her into a feverish and short-lived activity. By profession she was a copyist of pictures: very humbly and devotedly she trod in the track of great departed artists, and seemed, for the most part, quite devoid of any personal ambition. But every now and again she appeared possessed by an evanescent desire to achieve something greater; and while this fit lasted she was wont to make sketches of original paintings, and exhibit them for approval to her fellow-workers in the gallery.

It was the favourite amusement of some mocking, ill-natured spirits extravagantly to praise these attempts, and nothing could be more touching than the expression with which Mademoiselle Marthe would listen to their words. Gratitude, unwilling doubt, the longing to believe, the desire to love, the sad, sad secret-sense of artistic incapacity struggled for mastery in her half-childlike, ever-questioning, and wholly mournful eyes. One day in the gallery, Winifred being present, Mademoiselle Marthe had been made, as usual, the butt of the rest. Marie Duchêne, the terror of everybody for her cruel tongue, Clara Smythe, an underbred English girl, and half a dozen others had gathered in front of the sketch, and were exalting it in their usual style.

"C'est épatant," declared Marie, in mock rapture.

"*Too* lovely," added Clara.

"Look at the grouping!" "The expression!" "Ce coloris!" "The feeling!"

Thus ran the chorus, accompanied by motions and gestures. Winifred, her back turned to them all, went on painting in silent indignation.

Presently, when the victim had gone away, Marie mockingly began upon her. "Notre chère Winifred! Does such genius render her jealous, or simply strike her dumb?" A general laugh greeted this.

Winifred turned. "I think you should all be ashamed of yourselves," she said, quietly, but her blue eyes flashed like a sword in the sun.

There was a pause of amazement. "Well, to be sure!" exclaimed Clara, with a toss of her head.

"Tiens! tiens!" murmured Marie, and made a grimace.

"I am quite in earnest," continued Winifred, unmoved. "I think you all behave disgracefully to that poor old woman. She is not very wise, but she is a gentle, unoffending little soul, who would

not hurt a fly, and she does not perceive your ridicule, because ridicule finds no place in her own simple and kindly heart. She is full of reverence for the art which we all profess to follow, and although she never can succeed, because ungifted, her failure is a nobler thing than the facile degradation of talent which we pretend to honour as success."

"Is that intended for me?" flashed out Marie Duchêne.

"For anybody whom the cap may fit," answered Winifred coldly.

Then there was a sudden cry of "Hush," and the angry group turned, to find Mademoiselle Marthe standing behind Winifred, within hearing. She was very pale, and her aged baby-face had the pained look of her darker hours.

"I went out to buy galettes for you. Marie said she was hungry."

She held out her offering mechanically, as mechanically as she had spoken the words. One or two of the girls had the grace to look ashamed. Marie, with an exaggerated air of gratitude, sprang forward to embrace the little artist; but Mademoiselle Marthe drew back.

"I do not want your kisses, my dear," she said gently. "Somehow, they have a flavour of your praise."

She never showed anybody her sketches again; and, indeed, by degrees she ceased to make them. The lesson had been too cruel, and the memory of its pain, abiding with her, gradually quenched the faint, flickering flame of her belief in her own powers.

She did not overwhelm her champion with any expressions of gratitude, but showed her affection by a hundred small signs. If they were together in the gallery, she was never so happy as when allowed to scrape Winifred's palette, or wash her brushes, or run down to buy her luncheon. The snow had hardly melted from the ground before a bunch of sweet-smelling violets was left in the early morning, with the concierge, at Winifred's house; and one Christmas Day appeared a piping bullfinch which Mademoiselle Marthe had tamed and taught through many patient weeks.

In vain the girl sought to return these kindnesses. Mademoiselle Marthe would accept nothing from her, and contrived moreover to give to her rejection a gentle dignity, in touching contrast with her usual humble ways. Winifred herself was long before she ventured to penetrate to the tiny room which the little old maid called her home. When she did at last see it, she was agreeably surprised by it, for, although modest to the verge of bareness, it had nothing sordid. The plain, scanty furniture was scrupulously clean, and the windows were bright with flowers and birds.

"And you have lived here all alone for more than twenty years!" exclaimed Winifred, wondering what the unspoken chronicle of the long, lonely life had been. "You have friends—visitors?"

"I have friends—yes. Everybody is very kind to me. But I have no gentlemen or lady visitors, if that is what you mean. At

least not until you came," added Mademoiselle Marthe, with her faint but patient and pleased little smile.

Winifred, almost unconsciously, took her hand. "But now you will make friends among your own people. You will come to see us?" she exclaimed, impetuously.

"My own people? I have none," replied Mademoiselle Marthe. "My kindred are the poor and suffering."

The words had a sudden ring of pain, and a new expression swept over the speaker's face. It was not anger, still less resentment; it could hardly even be called bitterness. But it was full of a fathomless and blasting woe. Two burning spots had come into the wrinkled cheeks, the lips quivered with an agitation made all the more painful by the strained look of the tearless eyes. She drew a little away from her visitor, with a movement that unwittingly said how she shrank from commonplace compassion. Winifred began to talk about herself, her aims, her friends, her pictures, and thus drew to the surface that unselfish sympathy, which was the key-note to the other's reticent nature. In time, Winifred thought, she would vanquish the little woman's reserved timidity, and end by bringing about a meeting between her and Mr. Russell. She ardently desired this: for, dimly yet strongly feeling that Mademoiselle Marthe had been in some way wronged, she believed that her kind and clever uncle might be able to learn the secret. But in this aim she failed.

One day, indeed, Mademoiselle Marthe caught quickly at the name "Russell," which Winifred had for the first time mentioned.

"Is that your uncle's name? And *Walter*, did you say?" She turned rather pale, and seemed struggling to hide some emotion.

"Yes. Did you ever know him?" was the surprised question.

"Nay, there are many Russells in the world. And Walter Russells too." But even while thus answering, Mademoiselle Marthe looked strangely troubled. Winifred sat silent, expecting, hoping to be further questioned; but no interrogation came, and Mademoiselle Marthe began to talk of something else. Nevertheless her manner remained wistful: and as Winifred, on leaving, stooped to kiss her, she spoke in a trembling way.

"Does injustice make you angry, child? Could you be pitiful and loving even if the world reproached you for it?"

"Of course," replied Winifred.

To her surprise and consternation this answer provoked a burst of tears, the very first that she had seen in her friend. Tears are akin to speech: was the veil of this anguished past, whatever it might be, to be finally lifted?

No: Mademoiselle Marthe checked her emotion, almost as if ashamed of it, and dropped her head humbly. "It is so long since I have cried," she said, in her simple, patient way; and Winifred felt that the moment for questioning had not come.

With characteristic loyalty, she abstained from following up the

clue, if such it could be called, which the agitation at the name of Russell might have seemed to offer. That is, she did not describe Mademoiselle Marthe's singularities to her uncle, or ask him if he had ever known anybody answering to such a description.

The friendship, thus begun between the strangely-contrasted pair, was destined, on Winifred's side, to be intensified later by gratitude. The previous summer to this when we first make her acquaintance, her uncle and aunt having gone to England, she joined several other artists at Fontainebleau. Mademoiselle Marthe was there also, although she could not be said to belong to the party. Presently small-pox broke out. Winifred fell ill. Fortunately her attack proved of the mildest; but it sufficed to scare away all her companions save one. The exception was Mademoiselle Marthe, who suddenly proved herself of a rare efficiency. Feeling seemed to stand her in lieu of special intelligence; where suffering of any sort had to be alleviated, she always knew the right thing to do. And Winifred, tended by her with a limitless devotion, came to feel the moral superiority that was veiled by her persistent reserve. Formerly she had merely pitied Mademoiselle Marthe; now she respected and loved her. And when she got well, she thought she never could do enough to mark and proclaim her gratitude. The sight of such friendship stirred to malice the small souls of her fellow students.

During one of Winifred's rare visits to the gallery, when they were all back in Paris again, Clara Smythe began another battle.

"It is a pity you were not here yesterday, Miss Power. You might have heard 'something to your advantage,' as the advertisements say."

"To my advantage?" Winifred repeated, in surprise.

"Yes. That is, of course, if you consider it an advantage to be enlightened as to the true history of your friends."

There was a general little giggle at this, the rest of the girls being prepared for what was to come.

"I must trouble you to explain yourself," returned Winifred.

"Among the many kind of failures which you consider interesting, do you include the failure to keep out of prison?"

The colour rose in Winifred's cheeks. "I am a bad hand at guessing riddles," she said.

"Yesterday, my aunt, who was passing through Paris, came with me here," resumed the spiteful girl. "As we entered, your protégée, Mademoiselle Marthe, passed out. My aunt gave a great start of amazement on seeing her, for she recognised her as a person she had known once in England."

"Yes?" repeated Winifred, wondering what was coming.

"And who was condemned to a term of imprisonment for writing threatening letters."

There was a dead pause, then Winifred said coldly, "I presume your aunt gave you some particulars as to names and dates and places?"

"Really, Miss Power, to be frank, I was too shocked to ask for particulars," replied Clara.

"Then you must permit me to believe that your aunt made a mistake of identity. It could not have been Mademoiselle Marthe." And with these words, Winifred, who had already packed up her painting materials and made ready for her departure, turned her back and walked away.

"The Christian name was the same at any rate, and you can ask your friend if she has ever been in Kent," called out Clara: but Winifred was already out of hearing.

For several weeks Winifred saw nothing of Mademoiselle Marthe, for Mr. Russell became very ill and claimed all her attention. By the time he again partially recovered great things had happened. The King of Prussia had turned on his heel and left M. Benedetti standing in the sunlight on the promenade at Ems: war had been declared and the first shots fired; and although France did not yet fully foresee the catastrophe in store for her, matters began to look serious.

The Bonnards were leaving Paris in some haste for their country-house in Provence, and they invited Mr. and Mrs. Russell to accompany them. Winifred could not leave, for she had a picture to finish, and Mrs. Chandos-Fane had no fancy for French country-life. So she betook herself to Boulogne-sur-Mer, on the understanding that her daughter should join her there.

Winifred, thus left to her own devices, bethought herself one fine Sunday morning of Mademoiselle Marthe, and went off to see her.

"It is my birthday, dear," said the girl, giving her little friend a hug. "You cannot be so barbarous as to expect me to spend it all by myself. So you are just to come home and help me to eat the feast that Sophie has prepared for me. And afterwards we will go to the Bois and see the brides."

Mademoiselle Marthe was nothing loth. She made herself ready with her wonted care; one of the most characteristic and touching things about her being the exquisite neatness of her poor attire. Winifred, watching her affectionately, thought she seemed brighter than usual, and was struck anew with the child-like goodness underlying the age and sorrow of her face.

They sallied forth, and the girl's gleesome prattle, combined with the loveliness of the day, kept up the pleased look in her companion's eyes. For many long and weary years, indeed, Mademoiselle Marthe's dimmed glance had not dwelt with such untroubled peace on the serenity of the heavens. Such moments are the ambuscades of fate: another instant, and the blow falls.

All at once, the two friends came upon Clara Smythe and a party of girl-artists. Winifred would have passed on with a bow, but Mademoiselle Marthe, partly from innate courtesy, partly from habit, stopped and held out her hand. Miss Smythe, however, was equal

to the occasion. Drawing herself up with stony dignity, she looked the little woman over from head to foot. Then she dropped a curtsey.

"I think, madam, you must have mistaken me for some old acquaintance from Marleyford," she said, and walked away.

Her victim stood rooted on the sunlit path, still as a graven image, an image of Pain. She uttered no word, no sigh even, but her face turned so ashen grey that Winifred involuntarily cried aloud in alarm.

"Come home, dear," exclaimed the generous girl, quivering with indignation. "Never mind what they say; just come home with me."

The simple, ardent words fell upon unheeding ears. Mademoiselle Marthe mechanically allowed herself to be led away, but her awful silence remained unbroken. Only by a sign did she testify her wish to be taken to her own home instead of to Winifred's.

The latter, frightened at the unnatural calm, called a coach and put her into it. She went home with her; took off her dress; made her lie down; and petted her in womanly fashion. Then, not knowing what more to do, in a very passion of sympathy, she drew the trembling frame into her strong young arms, and kissed her friend in speechless pity. At the touch, Mademoiselle Marthe burst into a convulsion of tearless sobs, which seemed as if they would last for ever. Scared and powerless, Winifred sent in haste for a doctor. He administered a calming dose, and after a while the patient dropped asleep. But she awoke at the end of an hour or two, feverish and delirious. She began to rave incoherently about her own trial and the presence of Mary in the witness-box.

This one vision returned again and again with singular vividness; it was plain that of the many circumstances connected with her betrayal, the treachery of her cousin had burnt most deeply into Martha Freake's memory. The piteous prayer for truth, only the truth, reiterated every moment, seemed to tell its own tale; and Winifred, listening through the long watches of the night, registered a mental vow that if redress could be had she would obtain it. Her uncle and aunt came from Marleyford: from them it would be easy to learn the whole story.

Mademoiselle Marthe recovered. That is to say, consciousness returned to her, and with it something of her usual manner. But her face wore a constant look of torture, and instinctively Winifred felt that to question her would be like probing a quivering wound.

She consequently had no choice but to possess her soul in patience, and wait for some future chance of enlightenment. From her uncle and aunt she had failed to obtain information. Mr. Russell was too unwell to write, and his wife was one of those unsatisfactory correspondents who never answer questions. Finding that Mrs. Russell passed over the subject of Mademoiselle Marthe in silence, Winifred could but conclude that she had nothing of real interest regarding it to relate.

All this time events in the great world had been proceeding with startling rapidity. Sédan had been fought, the empire had fallen,

and the Prussians were marching upon Paris. There was a sauve-qui-peut among the foreigners, and Mrs. Chandos-Fane wrote to her daughter in hot haste to join her at Boulogne.

Winifred in her heart would rather have remained where she was. To her, not foreseeing what was to happen, the prospect of the siege held forth no terrors. Moreover, she loved Paris and felt all the inexplicable fascination which France, in her darkest as in her brightest days, can cast upon the minds of men. It was pain, to her, to quit in such an hour the great city where she had dwelt so long.

But Mrs. Fane's letter was imperative. That lady possessed one of those indefinite natures with which it is impossible to deal. On the surface as airy as gossamer, as light as the froth of the sea, she had a clinging tenacity of purpose which was not to be repressed.

Her present letter to Winifred was that of a lonely and loving mother. "I have but you in the world, my child," she wrote, in a delicate, flowing hand. "Since the death of your dear step-father, since my dear little children, one after another (your half-brothers and sisters, love) were taken from me, my life has been desolate. I say this in no reproachful spirit. You have your art (as you call it); and you make some money by it; naturally you have slipped into the habit of being absorbed by it. But you must *sometimes* think of your poor mamma. I am sure I am not exacting. You generally have your own way, darling; and I think I am always indulgent. But France is no place at present for a young girl. No, not even for my wise Winifred. . . . . who *thinks* herself so wise! I am going to England, and I should like you to come with me. Some mothers might say they *required* it: but I only say I should *like* it. My Winifred, after a little reflection, will perhaps see that the day may come when she will not be sorry she has sometimes done something to please her loving

"MAMSIE.

"P.S. I have met Sir John Hatherley here, and with him the three ladies whom he has so *generously* received into his home. He is very nice. Much nicer than his sister, *I* think. But of course that is only my opinion. He tells me of a charming cottage to let close by his own place. I should like to take it. But mothers have to consult their daughters nowadays."

Winifred read this epistle with some perplexity and a dim sense of pain. Her sensitive conscience made her very quick to blame herself and very much alive to reproach. She quite seriously asked herself if she had ever been wanting in love or respect to her mother? Yet if she had not, what did Mrs. Fane's insinuations mean?

There came a time of riper experience, when she learnt that the gist of her mother's letters had to be sought in their postscripts. But she was too young and too generous to understand this yet; and she felt vaguely dissatisfied with herself the whole day.

The notion of disregarding her mother's wishes, when so plainly

expressed, never even occurred to her. She packed her boxes with all speed; took a sorrowful farewell of Mademoiselle Marthe (whom no entreaties could persuade to leave Paris); a regretful one of the poor seamstress, Claire, and a mute one of all the familiar faces, all the well-known sights and sounds which had woven themselves into the many-coloured web of her student-life.

On reaching Boulogne-sur-Mer, she found Mrs. Chandos-Fane the centre of an admiring circle of devotees, who were disposed to regard Winifred herself with a lively interest slightly dashed with hostility.

For while talking of her daughter, praising her daughter, longing (as she said) for her daughter's arrival, the widow had managed in some subtle, probably unconscious way, to convey that her daughter did not appreciate her. "My beautiful Winifred"—"my clever Winifred"—"my terribly strong-minded Winifred," were words never off her lips. And as a rule people do not like the "clever or the strong-minded."

She had a great deal to tell about Sir John Hatherley, and to this Winifred listened with unfailing interest. Sir John, Mrs. Russell's brother, was, people said, her benefactor. This was never admitted by Mrs. Russell; she, besides being of a generally aggrieved turn of mind, considered herself particularly injured in being left by her father's will dependent upon her brother. Nothing that he could do seemed sufficient compensation for this original injustice. But others, looking at things from a different point of view, were disposed to think that the millionnaire did a good deal; for Mr. and Mrs. Russell owed their principal means of existence to his liberality.

Whenever additional money had been needed by *her*, he was written to, and, as far as Winifred knew, he had never failed to respond to the call. Personally Winifred felt grateful to him, for much of her education must have indirectly been paid for out of his purse.

Winifred had never seen Sir John; but she thought much of him, and always as a good and great man. She had lived abroad; in Italy, Germany, of late in France; he detested the Continent, and it was a mere chance which had recently brought him to spend, for the first time in his life, a few weeks at Boulogne-sur-Mer. The bathing there had been recommended for his widowed sister-in-law, Mrs. William Hatherley; who, with her two daughters, dwelt under Sir John's roof, further recipients of his bounty, being themselves penniless.

"When I saw those three women," said Mrs. Fane to her daughter, "I must say that the admiration I had always felt for that benevolent man was increased a thousandfold. *Such* a woman, she! and the young ones, oh so frivolous."

"Perhaps they suit him very well," replied Winifred, not always disposed to accept her mother's judgments.

"No doubt you know best, love," answered Mrs. Fane; "but I believe you have not seen them? No. So I thought. Then, subject to your future correction, I may be allowed to give my opinion.

I think they are quite unworthy to be the companions of such a man as Sir John."

"Is he so very cultivated, then?" asked Winifred, a little subdued.

"*I* think so. I believe that a love of old books is generally supposed to show a cultivated mind."

"That depends upon whether the collector reads them or not, answered Winifred brightly. "Sir John has always been something of a Sphinx to me. From his letters to Aunt Mary I never could make out what manner of man he was intellectually."

"You will soon know, my almost too-clever daughter," rejoined Mrs. Fane, with a smile and a little pat on Winifred's cheek. I have authorised Sir John to take for us the pretty cottage I told you about. We shall find him a delightful neighbour."

In a very short while Mrs. Fane crossed the channel with her daughter and maid, to take possession of this desirable cottage; which had been made ready for them. It was in the neighbourhood of Sir John Hatherley's residence of later years, and not too far from London. But on their arrival they heard that Sir John and his family were still away; and it struck Winifred that this piece of news curiously dashed her mother.

Mrs. Fane could console herself, if necessary, by contemplating Sir John's handsome residence, The Limes, its velvet lawns and its beautiful grounds. For the grand stuccoed mansion, placed on a slight rise, looked down upon the neighbourhood both metaphorically and materially. It was the largest and the finest house in the place, and the centre of much local social ambition: to be invited to it was an honour; to be shut out from it a reproach.

To Winifred, fresh from the roar of Paris, there was something very soothing in this suburban neighbourhood, with its pretty red-brick dwellings, with creepers climbing up them, and the flowers blooming in the beds behind the iron wickets. The neighbourhood was already a tolerably large one and grew, alas, daily. But there was still a common; still a rustic-looking ale-house; still a genuine English lane or two, which echoed to the cry of the cuckoo in spring and the songs of nightingales in summer. And on each side of the lanes were buttercup-strewn meadows, where kine crouched beneath the shade, and rooks cawed in the branches of the noble elms.

Mrs. Chandos-Fane had time to unpack all her dresses, and Winifred to settle down to her work, before the shutters of The Limes were opened and the butcher's boy and the baker's drove their carts with greater importance for the knowledge that "Sir John" had returned.

(To be continued.)

THE EBONY BOX.

NOT for a long while had Worcester been stirred as it was over this affair of Samson Dene's. What with the curious discovery of the box of guineas after its mysterious disappearance of years, and then its second no less mysterious loss, with the suspicion that Sam Dene stole it, the Faithful City was so excited as hardly to know whether it stood on its head or its heels.

When the police searched the prisoner on Thursday morning, after taking him into custody, and found the guinea upon him (having been told that he had one about him), his guilt was thought to be as good as proved. Sam said the guinea was his own, an heirloom, and stood to this so indignantly resolute that the police let him have it back. But now, what did Sam go and do? When released upon bail by the magistrates—to come up again on the Saturday—he went straight off to a silversmith's, had a hole stamped in the guinea and hung it to his watch-chain across his waistcoat, that the public might feast their eyes upon it. It was in this spirit of defiance—or, as the town called it, bravado—that he met the charge. His lodgings had been searched for the rest of the guineas, but they were not found.

The hour for the Saturday's examination—twelve o'clock—was striking, as I struggled my way with Austin Chance through the crush round the Guildhall. But that Austin's father was a man of consequence with the door-keepers, we should not have got in at all.

The accused, arraigned by his full name, Samson Reginald Dene, stood in the place allotted to prisoners, cold defiance on his handsome face. As near to him as might be permitted, stood Tod, just as defiant as he. Captain Charles Cockermuth, a third in defiance, stood opposite to prosecute; while Lawyer Cockermuth, who came in with Sam's uncle, Mr. Jacobson, openly wished his brother at Hanover. Squire Todhetley, being a county magistrate, sat on the bench with the City magnates, but not to interfere.

The proceedings began. Captain Cockermuth related how the little box, his property, containing sixty golden guineas, was left on the table in a sitting-room in his brother's house, the accused being the only person in the room at the time, and that the box disappeared. He, himself (standing at the front door), saw the accused quit the room; he went into it almost immediately, but the box was gone. He swore that no person entered the room after the prisoner left it.

Miss Betty Cockermuth, flustered and red, appeared next. She testified that she was in the room nearly all the morning, the little box being upon the table; when she left the room, Mr. Dene remained in it alone, copying a letter for her brother; the box was still on the table. Susan Edwards, housemaid at Lawyer Cockermuth's,

spoke to the same fact. It was she who had fetched her mistress out, and she saw the box standing upon the table.

The accused was asked by one of the magistrates what he had to say to this. He answered, speaking freely, that he had nothing to say in contradiction, except that he did not know what became of the box.

"Did you see the box on the table?" asked the lawyer on the opposite side, Mr. Standup.

"I saw it there when I first went into the room. Miss Betty made a remark about the box, which drew my attention to it. I was sitting at the far end of the room, at Mr. Cockermuth's little desk-table. I did not notice the box afterwards."

"Did you not see it there after Miss Cockermuth left the room?"

"No, I did not; not that I remember," answered Sam. "Truth to say, I never thought about it. My attention was confined to the letter I was copying, to the exclusion of everything else."

"Did anybody come into the room after Miss Cockermuth left it?"

"Nobody came into it. Somebody opened the door and looked in."

This was fresh news. The town-hall pricked up its ears.

"I do not know who it was," added Sam. "My head was bent over my writing, when the door opened quickly, and as quickly shut again. I supposed somebody had looked in to see if Mr. or Miss Cockermuth was there, and had retreated on finding they were not."

"Could that person, whomsoever it might be, have advanced to the table and taken the box?" asked the chief of the magistrates.

"No, sir. For certain, no!"—and Sam's tone here, he best knew why, was aggravatingly defiant. "The person might have put his head in—and no doubt did—but he did not set a foot inside the room."

Captain Cockermuth was asked about this: whether he observed anybody go to the parlour and look in. He protested till he was nearly blue with rage (for he regarded it as Sam's invention), that such a thing never took place, that nobody whatever went near the parlour door.

Next came up the question of the guinea, which was hanging from his watch-guard, shining and bold as if it had been brass. Sam had been questioned about this by the justices on Thursday, and his statement in answer to them was just as bold as the coin.

The guinea had been given him by his late father's uncle, Old Thomas Dene, who had jokingly enjoined him never to change it, always to keep it by him, and then he would never be without money. Sam had kept it; kept it from that time to this. He kept it in the pocket of an old-fashioned leather case, which contained some letters from his father, and two or three other things he valued. No, he was not in the habit of getting the guinea out to look at, he had retorted to a little badgering; had not looked at it (or at the case either, which lay in the bottom of his trunk) for months and months—yes, it might be years, for all he recollected. But on the Tuesday evening,

when talking with Miss Parslet about guineas, he fetched it to show to her; and slipped it into his pocket afterwards, where the police found it on the Thursday. This was the substance of his first answer, and he repeated it now.

"Do you know who is said to be the father of lies, young man?" asked Justice Whitewicker in a solemn tone, suspecting that the prisoner was telling an out-and-out fable.

"I have heard," answered Sam. "Have never seen him myself. Perhaps you have, sir." At which a titter went round the court, and it put his worship's back up. Sam went on to say that he had often thought of taking his guinea into wear and had now done it. And he gave the guinea a flick in the face of us all.

Evidently little good could come of a hardened criminal like this; and Justice Whitewicker, who thought nothing on earth so grand as the sound of his own voice from the bench, gave Sam a piece of his mind. In the midst of this a stir arose at the appearance of Maria Parslet. Mr. Chance led her in; her father, sad and shrinking as usual, walked behind them. Lawyer Cockermuth—and I liked him for it—made a place for his clerk next to himself. Maria looked modest, gentle and pretty. She wore black silk, being in slight mourning, and a dainty white bonnet.

Mr. Dene was asked to take tea with them in the parlour on the Tuesday evening, as a matter of convenience, Maria's evidence ran, in answer to questions, and she briefly alluded to the reason why. Whilst waiting together, he and she, for her father to come in, Mr. Dene told her of the finding of the ebony box of guineas at Mr. Cockermuth's. She laughingly remarked that a guinea was an out-of-date coin now, and she was not sure that she had ever seen one. In reply to that, Mr. Dene said he had one by him, given him by an old uncle some years before; and he went up stairs and brought it down to show to her. There could be no mistake, Maria added to Mr. Whitewicker, who wanted to insinuate a word of doubt, and her sweet brown eyes were honest and true as she said it; she had touched the guinea and held it in her hand for some moments.

"Held it and touched it, did you, Miss Parslet?" retorted Lawyer Standup. "Pray what appearance had it?"

"It was a thin, worn coin, sir," replied Maria; "thinner, I think, than a sovereign, but somewhat larger; it seemed to be worn thin at the edge."

"Whose image was on it?—what king's?"

"George the Third's. I noticed that."

"Now don't you think, young lady, that the accused took this marvellous coin from his pocket, instead of from some receptacle above stairs?" went on Mr. Standup.

"I am quite sure he did not take it from his pocket when before me," answered Maria. "He ran up stairs quickly, saying he would fetch the guinea: he had nothing in his hands then."

Upon this Lawyer Chance inquired of his learned brother why he need waste time in useless questions; begging to remind him that it was not until Wednesday morning the box disappeared, so the prisoner could not well have had any of its contents about him on Tuesday.

"Just let my questions alone, will you," retorted Mr. Standup, with a nod. "I know what I am about.—Now, Miss Parslet, please attend to me. Was the guinea you profess to have seen a perfect coin, or was there a hole in it?"

"It was a perfect coin, sir."

"And what became of it?"

"I think Mr. Dene put it in his waistcoat pocket: I did not particularly notice. Quite close upon that, my father came home and we sat down to tea. No, sir, nothing was said to my father about the guinea; if it was, I did not hear it. But he and Mr. Dene talked of the box of guineas that had been found."

"Who was it that called while you were at tea?"

"Young Mr. Chance called. We had finished tea then, and Mr. Dene took him upstairs to his own sitting-room."

"I am not asking you about young Mr. Chance; we shall come to him presently," was the rough-toned, but not ill-natured retort. "Somebody else called: who was it?"

Maria, blushing and paling ever since she stood up to the ordeal, grew white now. Mr. Badger had called at the door, she answered, and Mr. Dene went out to speak to him. Worried by Lawyer Standup as to whether he did not come to ask for money, she said she believed so, but she did not hear all they said.

Quiet Mr. Parslet was the next witness. He had to acknowledge that he did hear it. Mr. Badger appeared to be pressing for some money owing to him; could not tell the amount, knew nothing about that. When questioned whether the accused owed him money, Parslet said not a shilling; Mr. Dene had never sought to borrow of him, and had paid his monthly accounts regularly.

Upon that, Mr. Badger was produced; a thin man with a neck as stiff as a poker; who gave his reluctant testimony in a sweet tone of benevolence. Mr. Dene had been borrowing money from him for some time; somewhere about twenty pounds, he thought, was owing now, including interest. He had repeatedly asked for its repayment, but only got put off with (as he believed) lame excuses. Had certainly gone to ask for it on the Tuesday evening; was neither loud nor angry, oh, dear no; but did tell the accused he thought he could give him some if he would, and did say that he must have a portion of it within a week, or he should apply to Mr. Jacobson, of Elm Farm. Did not really mean to apply to Mr. Jacobson, had no wish to do anyone an injury, but felt vexed at the young man's off-handedness, which looked like indifference. Knew besides that Mr. Dene had other debts.

Now I'll leave you to judge how this evidence struck on the ears of old Jacobson. He leaped to the conclusion that Sam had been going all sorts of ways, as he supposed he went when in London, and might be owing, the mischief only knew how much money; and he shook his fist at Sam across the justice room.

Mr. Standup next called young Chance, quite to young Chance's surprise; perhaps also to his father's. He was questioned upon no end of things—whether he did not know that the accused was owing a great deal of money, and whether the accused had shown any guinea to him when he was in Edgar Street on the Tuesday night. Austin answered that he believed Mr. Dene owed a little money. not a great deal, so far as he knew; and that he had not seen the guinea or heard of it. And in saying all this, Austin's tone was just as resentfully insolent to Mr. Standup as he dared to make it.

Well, it is of no use to go on categorically with the day's proceedings. When they came to an end, the magistrates conferred pretty hotly in a low tone amongst themselves, some apparently taking up one opinion, as to Sam's guilt, or non-guilt, and some the other. At length they announced their decision, and it was as follows.

"Although the case undoubtedly presents grave grounds of suspicion against the accused, Samson Reginald Dene—'Very grave indeed,' interjected Mr. Whitewicker, solemnly—we do not consider them to be sufficient to commit him for trial upon; therefore, we give him the benefit of the doubt, and discharge him. Should any further evidence transpire, he can be brought up again."

"It was Maria Parslet's testimony about the guinea that cleared him," whispered the crowd, as they filed out.

And I think it must have been. It was just impossible to doubt her truth, or the earnestness with which she gave it.

Mr. Jacobson "interviewed" Sam, as the Americans say, and the interview was not a loving one. Being in the mood, he said anything that came uppermost. He forbade Sam to appear at Elm Farm ever again, as "long as oak and ash grew;" and he added that as Sam was bent on going to the Deuce head foremost, he might do it upon his own means, but that he'd never get any more help from him.

The way the Squire lashed up Bob and Blister when driving home—for, liking Sam hitherto, he was just as much put out as old Jacobson—and the duet they kept up together in abuse of his misdeeds, was edifying to hear. Tod laughed; I did not. The gig was given over this return journey to the two grooms.

"I do not believe Sam took the box, sir," I said to old Jacobson, interrupting a fiery oration.

He turned round to stare at me. "What do you say, Johnny Ludlow? *You do not believe he took the box?*"

"Well, to me it seems quite plain that he did not take it. I've hardly ever felt more sure of anything."

"Plain!" struck in the Squire. "How is it plain, Johnny? What grounds do you go upon?"

"I judge by his looks and his tones, sir, when denying it. They are to be trusted."

They did not know whether to laugh or scoff at me. It was Johnny's way, said the Squire; always fancying he could read the riddles in a man's face and voice. But they'd have thrown up their two best market-going hats with glee to be able to think it true.

II.

Samson Reginald Dene was relieved of the charge, as it was declared "not proven;" all the same, Samson Reginald Dene was ruined. Worcester said so. During the following week, which was Passion week, its citizens talked more of him than of their prayers.

Granted that Maria Parslet's testimony had been honestly genuine, a theory cropped up to counteract it. Lawyer Standup had been bold enough to start it at the Saturday's examination: a hundred tongues were repeating it now. Sam Dene, as may be remembered was present at the finding of the box on Tuesday; he had come up the passage and touched the golden guineas in it with the tips of his fingers: those fingers might have deftly extracted one of the coins. No wonder he could show it to Maria when he went home to tea! Captain Cockermuth admitted that in counting the guineas subsequently he had thought he counted sixty; but, as he knew there were (or ought to be) that number in the box, probably the assumption misled him, causing him to reckon them as sixty when in fact there were only fifty-nine. Which was a bit of logic.

Still, popular opinion was divided. If part of the town judged Sam to be guilty, part believed him to be innocent. A good deal might be said on both sides. To a young man who does not know how to pay his debts from lack of means, and debts that he is afraid of, too, sixty golden guineas may be a great temptation; and people did not shut their eyes to that. It transpired also that Mr. Jacobson, his own uncle, his best friend, had altogether cast Sam off and told him he might now go to the dogs his own way.

Sam resented it all bitterly, and defied the world. Far from giving in or showing any sense of shame, he walked about with an air, his head up, and that brazen guinea dangling in front of him. He actually had the face to appear at college on Good Friday (the congregation looking askance at him) and sat out the cold service of the day: no singing, no organ, and the little chorister-boys in black surplices instead of white ones.

But the crowning act of boldness was to come. Before Easter week had lapsed into the past, Sam Dene had taken two rooms in a conspicuous part of the town and set-up in practice. A big brass plate on the outer door displayed his name: "Mr. Dene, Attorney-at-law."

Sam's friends extolled his courage; Sam's enemies were amazed at his impudence. Captain Cockermuth prophesied that the ceiling of that office would come tumbling down on its crafty occupant's head: it was *his* gold that was paying for it.

The Cockermuths, like the town, were divided in opinion. Mr. Cockermuth could not believe Sam guilty, although the mystery of where the box could be puzzled him as few things had ever puzzled him in this life. He would fain have taken Sam back again, had it been a right thing to do. What the Captain thought need not be enlarged upon. While Miss Betty felt uncertain; veering now to this belief, now to that, and much distressed either way.

There is one friend in this world that hardly ever deserts us—and that is a mother. Mrs. Dene, a pretty little woman yet, had come flying to Worcester, ready to fight everybody in it on her son's behalf. Sam of course made his own tale good to her; whether it was a true one or not he alone knew, but not an angel from heaven could have stirred her faith in it. She declared that, to her positive knowledge, the old uncle had given Sam the guinea.

It was understood to be Mrs. Dene who advanced the money to Sam to set up with; it was certainly Mrs. Dene who bought a shutting-up bed (at old Ward's), and a gridiron, and a tea-pot, and a three-legged table, and a chair or two, all for the back room of the little office, that Sam might go into housekeeping on his own account, and live upon sixpence a day, so to say, until business came in. To look at Sam's hopeful face, he meant to do it, and to live down the scandal.

Looking at the thing impartially, one might perhaps see that Sam was not swayed by impudence in setting-up, so much as by obligation. For what else lay open to him?—no firm would engage him as clerk with that doubt sticking to his coat-tails. He paid some of his debts, and undertook to pay the rest before the year was out. A whisper arose that it was Mrs. Dene who managed this. Sam's adversaries knew better; the funds came out of the ebony box: that, as Charles Cockermuth demonstrated, was as sure as heaven.

But now there occurred one thing that I, Johnny Ludlow, could not understand, and never shall: why Worcester should have turned its back, like an angry drake, upon Maria Parslet. The school, where she was resident teacher, wrote her a cool, polite note, to say she need not trouble herself to return after the Easter recess. That example was followed. Pious individuals looked upon her as a possible story-teller, in danger of going to the bad in Sam's defence, nearly as much as Sam had gone.

It was just a craze. Even Charles Cockermuth said there was no sense in blaming Maria: of course Sam had deceived her (when pretending to show the guinea as his own), just as he deceived other people. Next the town called her "bold" for standing up in the face and eyes of the Guildhall to give her evidence. But how could

Maria help that? It was not her own choice: she'd rather have locked herself up in the cellar. Lawyer Chance had burst in upon her that Saturday morning (not ten minutes after we left the house), giving nobody warning, and carried her off imperatively, never saying "Will you, or Won't you." It was not his way.

Placid Miss Betty was indignant when the injustice came to her ears. What did people mean by it, she wanted to know. She sent for Maria to spend the next Sunday in Foregate Street, and marched with her arm-in-arm to church (St. Nicholas'), morning and evening.

As the days and the weeks passed, commotion gave place to a calm; Sam and his delinquencies were let alone. One cannot be on the grumble for ever. Sam's lines were pretty hard; practice held itself aloof from him; and if he did not live upon the sixpence a day, he looked at every halfpenny that he had to spend beyond it. His face grew thin, his blue eyes wistful, but he smiled hopefully.

"You keep up young Dene's acquaintance, I perceive," remarked Lawyer Chance to his son one evening as they were finishing dinner, for he had met the two young men together that day.

"Yes: why shouldn't I?" returned Austin.

"Think that charge was a mistaken one, I suppose?"

"Well I do, father. He has affirmed it to me in terms so unmistakable that I can but believe him. Besides, I don't think Dene, as I have always said, is the sort of fellow to turn rogue: I don't, indeed."

"Does he get any practice?"

"Very little, I'm afraid."

Mr. Chance was a man with a conscience. On the whole, he felt inclined to think Sam had not helped himself to the guineas, but he was by no means sure of it: like Miss Betty Cockermuth his opinion veered, now on this side, now on that, like a haunted weathercock. If Sam was not guilty, why, then, Fate had dealt hardly with the young fellow—and what would the end be? These thoughts were running through the lawyer's mind as he talked to his son and sat playing with his bunch of seals, which hung down by a short, thick gold chain, in the old-fashioned manner.

"I should like to say a word to him if he'd come to me," he suddenly cried. "You might go and bring him, Austin."

"What—this evening?" exclaimed Austin.

"Ay; why not. One time's as good as another."

Austin Chance started off promptly for the new office, and found his friend presiding over his own tea-tray in the little back room; the loaf and butter on the table, and a red herring on the gridiron.

"Hadn't time to get any dinner to day; too busy," was Sam's apology, given briefly with a flush of the face.—"Mr. Chance want's me? Well, I'll come. What is it for?"

"Don't know," replied Austin. And away they went.

The lawyer was standing at the window, his hands in the pockets of his pepper-and-salt trousers, tinkling the shillings and sixpences there. Austin supposed he was not wanted, and shut them in.

"I have been thinking of your case a good bit lately, Sam Dene," began Mr. Chance, giving Sam a seat and sitting down himself; "and I should like to feel, if I can, more at a certainty about it, one way or the other."

"Yes, sir," replied Sam. And you must please to note that manners in those days had not degenerated to what they are in these. Young men, whether gentle or simple, addressed their elders with respect; young women also. "Yes, sir," replied Sam. "But what do you mean about wishing to feel more at a certainty?"

"When I defended you before the magistrates, I did my best to convince them that you were not guilty: you had assured me you were not: and they discharged you. I believe my arguments and my pleadings went some way with them."

"I have no doubt of it, sir, and I thanked you at the time with all my heart," said Sam warmly. "Some of my enemies were bitter enough against me."

"But you should not speak in that way—calling people your enemies!" reproved the lawyer. "People were only at enmity with you on the score of the offence. Look here, Sam Dene—did you commit it, or did you not?"

Sam stared. Mr. Chance had dropped his voice to a solemn key, his head was pushed forward, gravity sat on his face.

"No, sir. No."

The short answer did not satisfy the lawyer. "Did you filch that box of guineas out of Cockermuth's room; or were you, and are you, as you assert, wholly innocent?" he resumed. "Tell me the truth as before heaven. Whatever it be, I will shield you still."

Sam rose. "On my sacred word, sir, and before heaven, I have told nothing but the truth. I did not take, or touch the box of guineas. I do not know what became of it."

Mr. Chance regarded Sam in silence. He had known young men, when under a cloud, prevaricate in a most extraordinary and unblushing manner: to look at them and listen to them, one might have said they were fit to be canonised. But he thought truth lay with Sam now.

"Sit down, sit down, Dene," he said. "I am glad to believe you. Where the deuce could the box have got to? It could not take flight through the ceiling up to the clouds, or down to the earth through the floor. *Whose hands took it?*"

"The box went in one of two ways," returned Sam. "If the Captain did not fetch it out unconsciously, and lose it in the street, why somebody must have entered the parlour after I left it and carried off the box. Perhaps the individual who looked into the room when I was sitting there."

"A pity but you had noticed who that was."

"Yes, it is. Look here, Mr. Chance; a thought has more than once struck me—if that person did not come back and take the box, why has he not come forward openly and honestly to avow it was himself who looked in?"

The lawyer gave his head a dissenting shake. "It is a ticklish thing to be mixed up in, he may think, one that he had best keep out of—though he may be innocent as the day.—How are you getting on?" he asked, passing abruptly from the subject.

"Oh, middling," replied Sam. "As well, perhaps, as I could expect to get on at first, with all the prejudice abroad against me."

"Earning bread-and-cheese?"

"Not quite—yet."

"Well, see here, Dene—and this is what I chiefly sent for you to say, if you could assure me on your conscience you deserved it—I may be able to put some little business in your hands. Petty matters are brought to us that we hardly care to waste time upon: I'll send them to you in future. I dare say you'll be able to rub on by dint of patience. Rome was not built in a day, you know."

"Thank you, sir: I thank you very truly," breathed Sam. "Mr. Cockermuth sent me a small matter the other day. If I can make a bare living of it at present, that's all I ask. Fame and fortune are not rained down upon black sheep."

Which was so true a remark as to need no contradiction.

May was nearing its close then, and the summer evenings were long and lovely. As Sam went forth from the interview, he thought he would take a walk by the river, instead of turning in to his solitary rooms. Since entering upon them he had been as steady as old Time: the accusation and its attendant shame seemed to have converted him from a heedless, youthful man into a wise old sage of age and care. Passing down Broad Street towards the bridge, he turned to the left and sauntered along beside the Severn. The water glittered in the light of the setting sun; barges, some of them bearing men and women and children, passed smoothly up and down on it; the opposite fields, towards St. John's, were green as an emerald: all things seemed to wear an aspect of brightness.

All on a sudden things grew brighter—and Sam's pulses gave a startling leap. He had passed the grand old red-stoned wall that enclosed the Bishop's palace, and was close upon the gates leading up to the Green, when a young lady turned out of them and came towards him with a light, quick step. It was Maria Parslet, in a pretty summer muslin, a straw hat shading her blushing face. For it did blush furiously at sight of Sam.

"Mr. Dene!"

"Maria!"

She began to say, hurriedly, that her mother had sent her with a message to the dressmaker on the Parade, and she had taken

that way, as being the shortest—as if in apology for having met Sam.

He turned with her, and they paced slowly along side by side, the colour on Maria's cheeks coming and going with every word he spoke and every look he gave her—which seemed altogether senseless and unreasonable. Sam told her of his conversation with Austin Chance's father, and his promise to put a few things in his way.

"Once let me be making two hundred a year, Maria, and then ——"

"Then what?" questioned Maria innocently.

"Then I should ask you to come to me, and we'd risk it together."

"Risk what?" stammered Maria, turning her head right round to watch a barge that was being towed by.

"Risk our luck. Two hundred a year is not so bad to begin upon. I should take the floor above as well as the ground floor I rent now, and we should get along. Anyway, I hope to try it."

"Oh, Mr. Dene!"

"Now don't you 'Mr. Dene' me, young lady, if you please. Why, Maria, what else can we do? A mean, malicious set of dogs and cats have turned their backs upon us both; the least we should do is to see if we can't do without them. I know you'd rather come to me than stay in Edgar Street."

Maria held her tongue, as to whether she would or not. "Mamma is negotiating to get me a situation at Cheltenham," she said.

"You will not go to Cheltenham, or anywhere else, if I get any luck," he replied dictatorially. "Life would look very blue to me now without you, Maria. And many a man and wife, rolling in riches at the end, have rubbed on with less than two hundred a year at the beginning. I'd not say, mind, but we might risk it on a hundred and fifty. My rent is low, you see."

"Ye—es," stammered Maria. "But—I wish that mystery of the guineas could be cleared up!"

Sam stood still, turned, and faced her. "Why do you say *that?* You are not suspecting that I took them?"

"Oh, dear, NO," returned Maria, losing her breath. "I *know* you did not take them: could not. I was only thinking of your practice: so much more would come in."

"Cockermuth has sent me a small matter or two. I think I shall get on," repeated Sam.

They were at their journey's end by that time, at the dressmaker's door. "Good evening," said Maria, timidly holding out her hand.

Sam Dene took it and clasped it. "Good-bye, my darling. I am going home to my bread-and-cheese supper, and I wish you were there to eat it with me!"

Maria sighed. She wondered whether that wonderful state of things would ever come to pass. Perhaps not; perhaps yes. Meanwhile no living soul knew aught of these treasonable aspirations; they were a secret between her and Sam. Mr. and Mrs. Parslet suspected nothing.

Time went on. Lawyer Chance was as good as his word, and put a few small matters of business into the hands of Sam Dene. Mr. Cockermuth did the same. The town came down upon him for it; though it let Chance alone, who was not the sort of man to be dictated to. "Well," said Cockermuth in answer, "I don't believe the lad is guilty; never have believed it. Had he been of a dishonest turn, he could have helped himself before, for a good deal of my cash passed at times through his hands. And, given that he was innocent, he has been hardly dealt by."

Sam Dene was grateful for these stray windfalls, and returned his best thanks to the lawyers for them. But they did not amount to much in the aggregate; and a gloomy vision began to present itself to his apprehension of being forced to give up the struggle, and wandering out in the world to seek a better fortune. The summer assizes drew near. Sam had no grand cause to come on at them, or small one either; but it was impossible not to give a thought now and again to what his fate might have been, had he stood committed to take his trial at them. The popular voice said that was only what he merited.

III.

THE assizes were held, and passed. One hot day, when July was nearing its meridian, word was brought to Miss Cockermuth—who was charitable—that a poor sick woman whom she befriended, was worse than usual, so she put on her bonnet and cloak to pay her a visit. The bonnet was a huge Leghorn, which shaded her face well from the sun, its trimming of straw colour; and the cloak was of thin black "taffeta," edged with narrow lace. It was a long walk on a hot afternoon, for the sick woman lived but just on this side Henwick. Miss Betty had got as far as the bridge, and was about to cross it when Sam Dene, coming over it at a strapping pace, ran against her.

"Miss Betty!" he cried. "I beg your pardon."

Miss Betty brought her bonnet from under the shade of her large grass-green parasol. "Dear me, is it you, Sam Dene?" she said. "Were you walking for a wager?"

Sam laughed a little. "I was hastening back to my office, Miss Betty. I have no clerk, you know, and a client *might* come in."

Miss Betty gave her head a twist, something between a nod and a shake; she noticed the doubtful tone in the "might." "Very hot, isn't it?" said she. "I'm going up to see that poor Hester Knowles; she's uncommon bad, I hear."

"You'll have a warm walk."

"Ay. Are you pretty well, Sam? You look thin."

"Do I? Oh, that's nothing but the heat of the weather. I am quite well, thank you. Good afternoon, Miss Betty."

She shook his hand heartily. One of Sam's worst enemies, who

might have run in a curricle with Charles Cockermuth, as to an out-and-out belief in his guilt, was passing at the moment, and saw it.

Miss Betty crossed the bridge, turned off into Turkey, for it was through those classical regions that her nearest and coolest way lay, and so onwards to the sick woman's room. There she found the blazing July sun streaming in at the wide window, which had no blind, no shelter whatever from it. Miss Betty had had enough of the sun out of doors, without having it in. Done up with the walk and the heat, she sat down on the first chair, and felt fit to swoon right off.

"Dear me, Hester, this is bad for you!" she gasped.

"Do you mean the sun, ma'am?" asked the sick woman, who was sitting full in it, wrapped in a blanket or two. "It is a little hot just now, but I don't grumble at it; I'm so cold mostly. As soon as the sun goes off the window, I shall begin to shiver."

"Well-a-day!" responded Miss Betty, wishing she could be cool enough to shiver. "But if you feel it cold now, Hester, what will you do when the autumn winds come on?"

"Ah, ma'am, please do not talk of it! I just can't tell what I shall do. That window don't fit tight, and the way the wind pours in through it upon me as I sit here at evening, or lie in my little bed there, passes belief. I'm coughing always then."

"You should have some good thick curtains put up," said Miss Betty, gazing at the bare window, which had a pot of musk on its sill. "Woollen ones."

The sick woman smiled sadly. She was very poor now, though it had not always been so; she might as well have hoped to buy the sun itself as woollen curtains—or cotton curtains either. Miss Betty knew that.

"I'll think about it, Hester, and see if I've got any old ones that I could let you have. I'm not sure; but I'll look," repeated she—and began to empty her capacious dimity pockets of a few items of good things she had brought.

By-and-by, when she was a little cooler and had talked with Hester, Miss Betty set off home again, her mind running upon the half-promised curtains. "They are properly shabby," thought she, as she went along, "but they'll serve to keep the sun and the wind off her."

She was thinking of those warm green curtains that she had picked the braid from that past disastrous morning—as the reader heard of, and all the town as well. Nothing had been done with them since.

Getting home, Miss Betty turned into the parlour. Susan—who had not yet found leisure to fix any time for her wedding—found her mistress fanning her hot face, her bonnet untied and tilted back.

"I've been to see that poor Hester Knowles, Susan," began Miss Betty.

"Law, ma'am!" interposed Susan. "What a walk for you this scorching afternoon! All up that wide New Road!"

"You may well say that, girl: but I went Turkey way. She's very

ill, poor thing; and that's a frightfully staring window of hers, the sun on it like a blazing sheet of fire, and not as much as a rag for a blind; and the window don't fit, she says, and in cold weather the biting wind comes in and shivers her up. I think I might give her those shabby old curtains, Susan—that were up in Mr. Philip's room, you know, before we got the new chintz ones in."

"So you might, ma'am," said Susan, who was not a bad-hearted girl, except to the baker's man. "They can't go up at any of our windows as they be; and if you had 'em dyed, I don't know as they'd answer much, being so shabby."

"I put them—let me see—into the spare ottoman, didn't I? Yes, that was it. And there I suppose they must be lying still."

"Sure enough, Miss Betty," said Susan. "I've not touched 'em."

"Nor I," said Miss Betty. "With all the trouble that got into our house at that time, I couldn't give my mind to seeing after the old things, and I've not thought about them since. Come up stairs with me now, Susan; we'll see what sort of a state they are in."

They went up; and Miss Betty took off her bonnet and cloak and put her cap on. The spare ottoman, soft, and red, and ancient, used as a receptacle for odds and ends that were not wanted, stood in a spacious linen-closet on the first floor landing. It was built out over the back door, and had a skylight above. Susan threw back the lid of the ottoman, and Miss Betty stood by. The faded old brown curtains, green once, lay in a heap at one end, just as Miss Betty had hastily flung them in that past day in March, when on her way to look at the chintzes.

"They're in a fine rabble, seemingly," observed Susan, pausing to regard the curtains.

"Dear me!" cried Miss Betty, conscience-stricken, for she was a careful housewife, "I let them drop in any way, I remember. I did mean to have them well-shaken out of doors and properly folded, but that bother drove it all out of my head. Take them out, girl."

Susan put her strong arms underneath the heap and lifted it out with a fling. Something heavy flew out of the curtains, and dropped on the boarded floor with a crash. Letting fall the curtains, Susan gave a wild shriek of terror and Miss Betty gave a wilder, for the floor was suddenly covered with shining gold coins. Mr. Cockermuth, passing across the passage below at the moment, heard the cries, wondered whether the house was on fire, and came hastening up.

"Oh," said he coolly, taking-in the aspect of affairs. "So the thief was you, Betty, after all!"

He picked up the ebony box, and bent his head to look at the guineas. Miss Betty sank down on a three-legged stool—brought in for Philip's children—and grew whiter than death.

Yes, it was the missing box of guineas, come to light in the same extraordinary and unexpected manner that it had come before, without having been (as may be said) truly lost. When Miss Betty

gathered her curtains off the dining-room table that March morning, a cumbersome and weighty heap, she had unwittingly gathered up the box with them. No wonder Sam Dene had not seen the box on the table after Miss Betty's departure! It was a grievous misfortune, though, that he failed to take notice it was not there.

She had no idea she was not speaking truth in saying she *saw* the box on the table as she left the room. Having seen the box there all the morning she thought it was there still and that she saw it, being quite unconscious that it was in her arms. Susan, too, had noticed the box on the table when she opened the door to call her mistress, and believed she was correct in saying she saw it there to the last: the real fact being that she had not observed it was gone. So there the box with its golden freight had lain undisturbed, hidden in the folds of the curtains. But for Hester Knowles's defective window, it might have stayed there still, who can say how long?

Susan, no less scared than her mistress, stood back against the closet wall for safety, out of reach of those diabolical coins; Miss Betty, groaning and half-fainting on the three-legged stool, sat pushing back her cap and her front. The lawyer picked up the guineas and counted them as he laid them flat in the box. Sixty of them: not one missing. So Sam's guinea *was* his own! He had not, as Worcester whispered, trumped up the story with Maria Parslet.

"John," gasped poor Miss Betty, beside herself with remorse and terror, "John, what will become of me now? Will anything be done?"

"How 'done'?" asked he.

"Will they bring me to trial—or anything of that—in poor Sam's place?"

"Well, I don't know," answered her brother grimly: "perhaps not this time. But I'd have you take more care in future, Betty, than to hide away gold in old curtains."

Locking the box securely within his iron safe, Mr. Cockermuth put on his hat and went down to the town hall, where the magistrates, after dispensing their wisdom, were about to disperse for the day. He told them of the wonderful recovery of the box of guineas, of how it had been lost, and that Sam Dene was wholly innocent. Their worships were of course charmed to hear it, Mr. Whitewicker observing that they had only judged Sam by appearances, and that appearances had been sufficient (in theory) to hang him.

From the town hall, Mr. Cockermuth turned off to Sam's office. Sam was making a great show of business, surrounded by a tableful of imposing parchments, but with never a client to the fore. His old master grasped his hand.

"Well, Sam, my boy," he said, "the tables have turned for you. That box of guineas is found."

Sam never spoke an answering word. His lips parted with expectation; his breath seemed to be a little short.

"Betty had got it all the time. She managed somehow to pick it

up off the table with those wretched old curtains she had there, all unconsciously, of course, and it has lain hidden with the curtains upstairs in a lumber box ever since. Betty will never forgive herself. She'll get a fit of the jaundice over this."

Sam drew a long breath. "You will let the public know, sir?"

"Ay, Sam, without loss of an hour. I've begun with the magistrates—and a fine sensation the news made amid 'em, I can tell you; and now I'm going round to the newspapers; and I shall go over to Elm Farm the first thing to-morrow. The town took up the cause against you, Sam: take care it does not eat you now in its repentance. Look here, you'll have to come round to Betty, or she'll wail her heart out: you won't bear malice, Sam?"

"No, that I won't," said Sam warmly. "Miss Betty did not bear it to me. She has been as kind as can be all along."

The town did want to eat Sam.—It is the custom of the true Briton to go to extremes. Being unable to shake Sam's hands quite off, the city would fain have chaired him round the streets with honours, as it used to chair its newly-returned members.

Captain Cockermuth, sent for post haste, came to Worcester all contrition, beseeching Sam to forgive him fifty times a day, and wanting to press the box of guineas upon him as a peace-offering. Sam would not take it: he laughingly told the Captain that the box did not seem to carry luck with it.

And then Sam's troubles were over. And no objection was made by his people (as it otherwise might have been) to his marrying Maria Parslet, by way of recompense. "God never fails to bring good out of evil, my dear," said old Mrs. Jacobson to Maria, the first time they had got her on a visit at Elm Farm. As to Sam, he had short time for Elm Farm, or anything else in the shape of recreation. Practice was flowing in quickly: litigants arguing, one with another, that a young man, lying for months under an imputation of theft, and then coming out of it with flying colours, must needs be a clever lawyer.

"But, Johnny," Sam said to me, when talking of the past, "there's one thing I would alter if I made the laws. No person, so long as he is only suspected of crime, should have his name proclaimed publicly. I am not speaking of murder, you understand, or charges of that grave nature; but of such a case as mine. My name appeared in full, in all the local newspapers, Samson Reginald Dene, coupled with theft, and of course it got a mark upon it. It is an awful blight upon a man when he is innocent, one that he may never quite live down. Suspicions must arise, I know that, of the innocent as well as the guilty, and they must undergo preliminary examinations in public and submit to legal inquiries: but time enough to proclaim who the man is when evidence strengthens against him, and he is committed for trial: until then let his name be suppressed. At least that is my opinion."

And it is mine as well as Sam's.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

THE CRUISE OF THE RESERVE SQUADRON.

By Charles W. Wood,
Author of "Through Holland," "In the Black Forest," etc.

ONCE in Arosa Bay, everything approaching to a Northern climate had disappeared. The heat, indeed, was intense, the roads were inches thick in dust, the long stretch of flat shore looked white and broiling in the sunshine. Here and there, in our walks, we encountered the grateful shade of a small plantation of trees; and, at intervals, the eucalyptus, though casting little shadow, broke the extreme fervour of the glare.

Yet the Spanish women braved the noonday heat with no other covering to their heads than the graceful mantilla. Many, indeed, disdained even that small protection, and seemed to think nothing of the scorching rays, that we, sheltered by umbrellas, found it so hard to endure with serenity of mind.

The town is called Carril. It is a seaport of some little consequence, being the nearest to Santiago, and in direct railway communication with that venerable city. Carril is divided into two distinct portions, separated from each other by more than a mile of hot, straight, dusty white road: if, indeed, both settlements were called Carril — a point I never ascertained with complete accuracy. Carril proper was in itself small, rather dilapidated-looking, yet not unpicturesque. These foreign towns seldom are unpicturesque; they possess details of colouring and arrangement, all seen through a rarified atmosphere, that we in England know nothing about, might sigh for in vain, and in vain attempt to imitate. The houses were small and sufficiently homely; only one here and there, such as the custom-house on the quay, rising to anything of importance. Most of the green Venetian shutters were closed against the heat; but the lower half was made to lift up; and a dark-eyed Spanish beauty looked more captivating than ever, as, from these picture-frames, she dispensed abroad the favour of her glances.

It was from such a coign of vantage that Captain Pyramid received his magnificent lily, which he afterwards pressed between the leaves of the Sanskrit volume so often in his hands in the ward-room. The sight of it would cast a halo upon that not very romantic labour, and spur him on to fresh triumphs, as he quietly assured me. He would now and then get laughed at by one or the other on the score of sentiment; but they who laughed were actuated by burning jealousy much more than by the spirit of fun. Van Stoker, whose mind was filled with one image, and one image alone, left him in peace; felt for him, indeed, much sympathy; offered him—with a

deliberate incremation, so to say, of his tenderest feelings one could but admire—a few of his sonnets, all ready done up for post at the next port we touched at, and never originally destined to raise the flutter of emotion in the breast of a Spanish maiden. But Darcy, at sight of the pressed leaves, would fly to his collection of photographs and artistic silhouettes, and forget himself, if possible, in their contemplation; and Darrille would withdraw to his cabin, plunge into dry statistics, and read up torpedo practice; whilst Wakeham would go off and pace the bridge, and confide his opinions to the Officer of the watch. But Pyramid all the time quietly went on his way, and made no sign.

Down the long mile of road that separated the two Carrils, we passed girls at the brooks, washing, laughing, and wondering what meant this sudden invasion of ships and strangers. Bending over their linen, a lively chatter keeping time and tune to the babbling of the stream hurrying to the sea, looking up and making unintelligible remarks as we passed, they formed quite pretty and interesting groups. At the edge of the shore we watched the nets raised, and the sardines hauled in in large quantities, jumping about, and asking to be put back into their cool retreats. But they, in the hands of the Philistines, were transferred to baskets and buckets, and carried away.

A small crowd assisted at the ceremony, some of them beggars seeking alms in kind or coin. They are one of the curses as well as annoyances of Spain. In all towns they swarm round you like wasps, and are as difficult to shake off. Many are licensed by the Government, which thereby derives a considerable but questionable revenue. To induce almsgiving, they will hold out their medal, strung round their necks as a badge of their respectable trade, and almost thrust it into your face. More often than not, a mere glance at them produces a shock; and, to get rid of an unpleasant sight, you sin against your conscience, and throw them a dole.

The day after we reached Arosa Bay, a special train to Santiago was put on for the Duke and for those Officers of the Fleet who could, or cared to, make use of the opportunity. About seventy thus visited the ancient city.

The morning was brilliant, and the blue skies of the South, and the buoyancy of the air made the heat an easier matter to bear than that of our heavier climate. The journey was in itself interesting. For some time, the blue waters of Arosa Bay were visible to the left. We passed between banks of aloes with their prickly darts shooting outwards, so often a distinguishing feature in the Spanish landscape. Olive trees grew in the plains and up the slopes, their sage-green foliage standing out in vivid contrast with all other. The whole country undulated and divided into fertile plains, valleys and hills, here barren and rocky, there clothed with soft and soothing verdure. The rich vegetation of the South gives to its vales and pastures a picturesque, and, to anyone familiar with its features, an

eastern aspect, suggestive of the voluptuousness of the Arabian Nights. All we wanted to complete the impression was the Princess Scheharazade, to tell us tales and to beguile the dusty journey with her dulcet tones and witching beauty; or Aladdin's Lamp to supply our needs, simple or capricious; or the trees around to be hung with jewels, demanding to be gathered and appropriated.

The dust referred to was, indeed, our only drawback to complete enjoyment; that, and the blacks from the engine. We all reached Santiago a combination of sweeps and millers. Our own compartment was full, but, from the *Defence*, contained only Pyramid, Oxford, and myself. Next to Pyramid, Oxford was perhaps the finest fellow in the Fleet. (He, by the way, was sent out to Egypt on our return to England, went through the war, and took part in every engagement. Recently, when out in Malta, I found that he had touched there on his way back to England, bronzed, almost blackened by the sun, beyond recognition.)

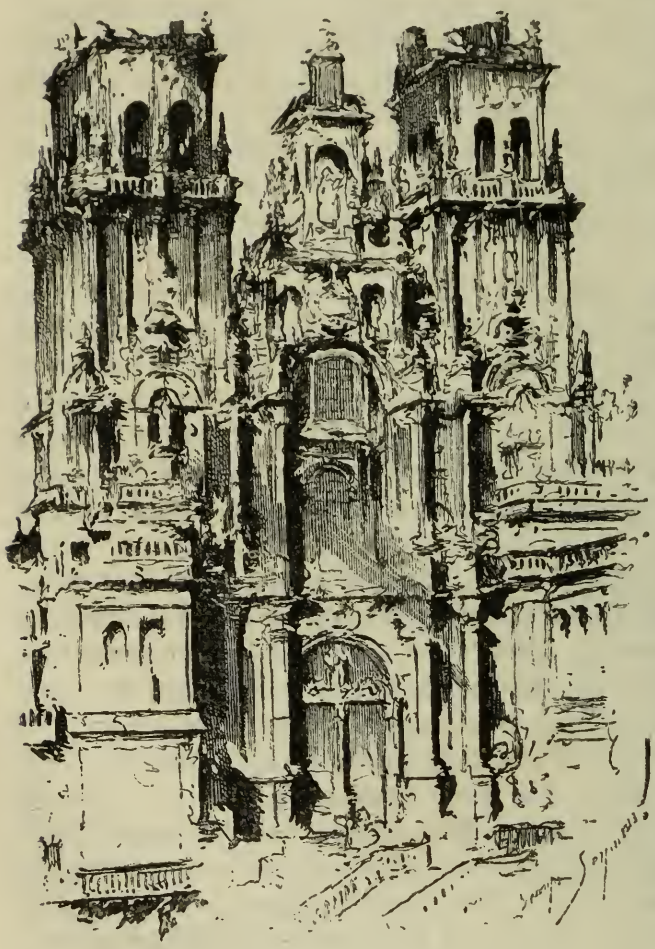
It was hard for all to reach Santiago shorn of some portion of their just due of personal appearance; but hardest for those who had a great deal of appearance to care about. Thus Pyramid, once on the platform of Santiago, endeavoured to persuade the station-master to run a special train at once back to Carril. But it was only a single line, and that official with a thousand regrets protested that it was impossible. The obstruction to the ordinary traffic would be disastrous.

The line of rail on approaching Santiago is a marvel of ingenuity, and seems almost to describe a circle, producing an effect that makes you begin to think yourself really and truly in the land of wonders and Eastern magic. You see the town on the heights on the one hand, its heavy cathedral towers standing out magnificently against a background of pure blue sky. Too weighty for the rest of the building, here nothing but the grandeur of these towers is apparent. Groves, gardens and palm trees adorn the landscape. On the other hand you perceive the great building and extensive walls of a convent rising in the midst of a depression. The next moment, surprised and bewildered you find that town and convent and different surrounding features have changed places; right has become left and left right. The train, sweeping round imperceptibly, has given rise to the transformation. Thus it happened that we found ourselves on the platform at Santiago feeling very much as if we had been turned upside down.

The approach to the town is striking. It lies on the slope of the hill and crowns the summit. White, cool-looking houses with their green shutters jealously closed, are surrounded by gardens and a wealth of flowers and vegetation undreamed of in sterner climes. The double geranium, especially, grows here like a weed, its hues strangely beautiful and brilliant; the palm tree raises its head, and the eucalyptus throws out its healing virtue. Tall grasses wave and rustle and

murmur, and bend their feathery fronds in graceful yielding to the wind. The train passes over a viaduct, and the plain on either hand looks quite deep and far reaching; making the town-crowned heights seem loftier than they are. The journey has been pleasant all through, but its termination raises one to a pitch of quiet excitement and activity. We steam slowly into the station, feeling some curiosity as to what lies before us.

The authorities were on the platform to receive the Admiral and his brother the Duke of Connaught. They drove off at once in carriages, and we immediately followed.



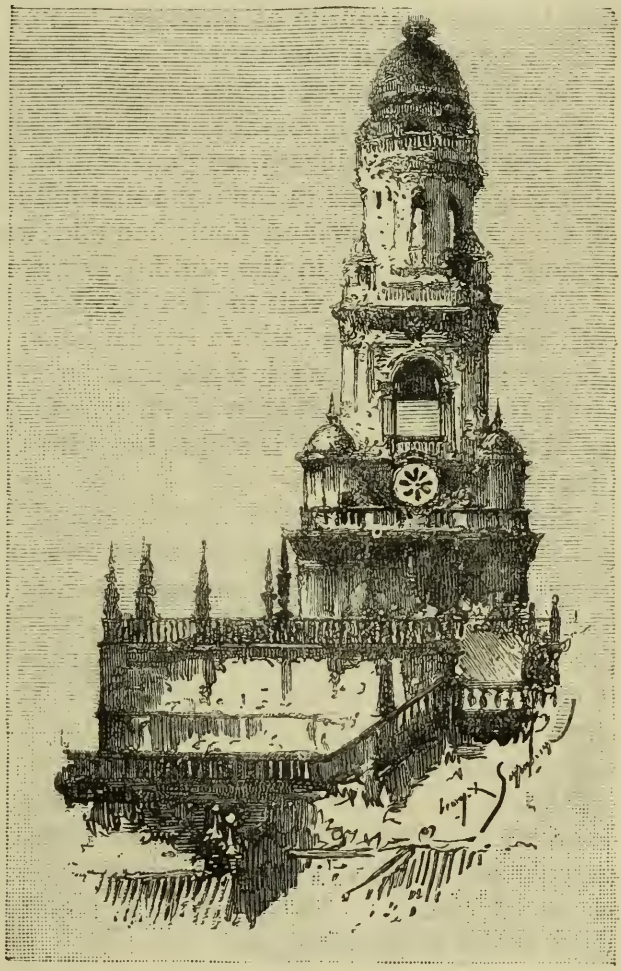
CATHEDRAL.

The town is a little distance from the station; it is all uphill to get there; the roads were white and dusty; the heat touched fever point. Few of us preferred to walk. The four little horses attached to our carriage galloped along and raised a cloud that must have threatened suffocation to those coming up behind. Turning to the right, and to more level ground, we passed between a crowd of gazers on the one side, and the public gardens, well laid out, on the other. Every window was filled rows deep. Innumerable bright eyes flashed forth; but, alas, we reaped no lilies for our well-directed points of admiration. The whole town was astir and afloat at this rare and unusual visitation.

We reached the heart of the city; our Jehu defiling through narrow thoroughfares and turning impossible corners in a miraculous manner. Now he seemed about to shoot under the arcades that line the streets on each side, and jut out beyond the houses: a catastrophe that certainly would have terminated our brilliant careers there and then; and now, plunging recklessly down hill and turning a sharp angle, we swayed about in a way that reminded us of nothing so much as of

the rolling of the good *Defence*. I looked at Pyramid: he took my meaning and turned a shade paler. "Yes," he murmured; "there are other dangers in Spain than brigands; and not only before going to the Alhambra should a man make his will.—Oxford, have you made yours?"

"Yes," replied Oxford in a slightly depressed tone. "The day before we reached Arosa Bay, urged by a presentiment. I have left all I possess to the Blue Ribbon Army, and have made you two joint executors. I felt that you would see the trust properly carried out, not dreaming that we should all three be running the same risk at the same time."



BELFRY.

Certainly the streets of Santiago seemed designed for man-traps and pitfalls. They are all hilly, narrow and badly-paved; slippery flags, with no grip for the horses' feet, and hard stones that generally find out the weak points—if you possess any—in your own. No side pavement or curbstones; nothing but dull and gloomy arcades, that still further contract the thoroughfares, and give them a heavy aspect. But they also make it look old-world and picturesque, and a distinct and vivid impression remains upon the memory.

Our conveyance finally deposited us, safe and sound, at the door of the Fonda Suiza, supposed to be the best hotel in the town. Time being necessarily short, we at once proceeded to the great attraction of the place—the cathedral, and were admitted to all parts, relics and curiosities; the veil being raised for the Dukes, that, in some instances, is lifted only on the rarest state occasions.

Santiago de Compostella. The Pilgrim City. The Holy City. It has many names, and has had its day of grandeur—the most

complete of all earth's greatnesses: that which proceeds from religious fervour and fanaticism. Santiago—or the City of St. James the Elder: Compostella—because a star is said to have indicated where the Saint's body was buried.

The city was founded as far back as A.D. 829, by Theodimir, Bishop of Tria. The body of St. James was supposed to have been discovered by a miraculous indication direct from Heaven, and a church was erected upon the site. The town dates from this period, and became a favourite of pilgrims; one of the great shrines of the world; approached with veneration, and supposed to work wonders of healing. In those earlier centuries such errors might well be impressed upon an ignorant and superstitious world. It is not so long since these things were practised in England; and even now pilgrimages are taken in the hope that miracles will follow. Santiago de Compostella grew and flourished and waxed great, becoming the second religious city in the world. For everything yielded to Rome.

Thus viewed, our visit to Santiago had marked interest, and the cathedral was endowed with a special halo; linking together past and present; combining, as it were, that far off age of superstition and terror (for Santiago has seen the tortures of the Inquisition, and the awful Council Chamber is still there) with the enlightened days of the nineteenth century.

The cathedral at once arrests attention as being no ordinary building. That which most impresses one is that which is first seen—the exterior. It possesses a wonderfully old-world appearance; a look of such antiquity that you might imagine it about to fall to pieces; a perfect and colossal ruin, needing but the touch of a hand to lay it low in the dust. I have never seen any building bear, apparently, such traces of the destroying hand of Time. And this aspect is not confined to the cathedral alone. Other large buildings of the town, such as the University and the Hospital, look equally woe-begone, grey and decrepit. To gaze upon them is sufficient to reduce the mind to melancholy. It is gazing at departed grandeur, yet at something infinitely more beautiful now than in the vanished days.

The whole town, indeed, possesses this grave and melancholy appearance, giving one a death-in-life kind of sensation, inexpressibly dismal, and making a long sojourn there impossible. This mournful aspect is said to be due less to the effects of time than to the action of the atmosphere. It is peculiarly humid; and the humidity has laid its mark upon all, and tinged all with the mournful hue of death. Santiago is one of those places that affect the mind powerfully at a first visit; and it is well to make the visit a short one.

The first feeling with regard to the interior of the cathedral—and I am not sure that it is not the last—is one of disappointment. To begin with, it is steeped in that dim religious gloom so essentially out of place in a building of this description. Ponderous and massive,

there is not sufficient light to remove from the mind a feeling of undue heaviness and weight. It is in the form of a Latin cross, but as only a small portion of the building, apparently, could be seen at once, it was difficult to gain any idea of its general effect. Between the massive pillars, the heavy though splendid screens, the immense curtains, the interior seemed spoilt and overcrowded by its own adornments.

The gloom alluded to is said to be designed in order that the illuminations at the High Altar (composed of massive silver: a really gorgeous and splendid work) may shine forth more conspicuously at their great festivals. At such times the effect upon the mind of the worshipper is no doubt thrilling, the sight as imposing as sight can well be; whilst the figure of St. James, magnificent in burnished gold and flashing jewelry and elaborate surroundings, stands out in a blaze of ornamentation. But it seems an error to sacrifice light, so much needed, to an occasional and passing result. We saw no illumination, no blaze of glory; only the darkness: and occasionally we stumbled.

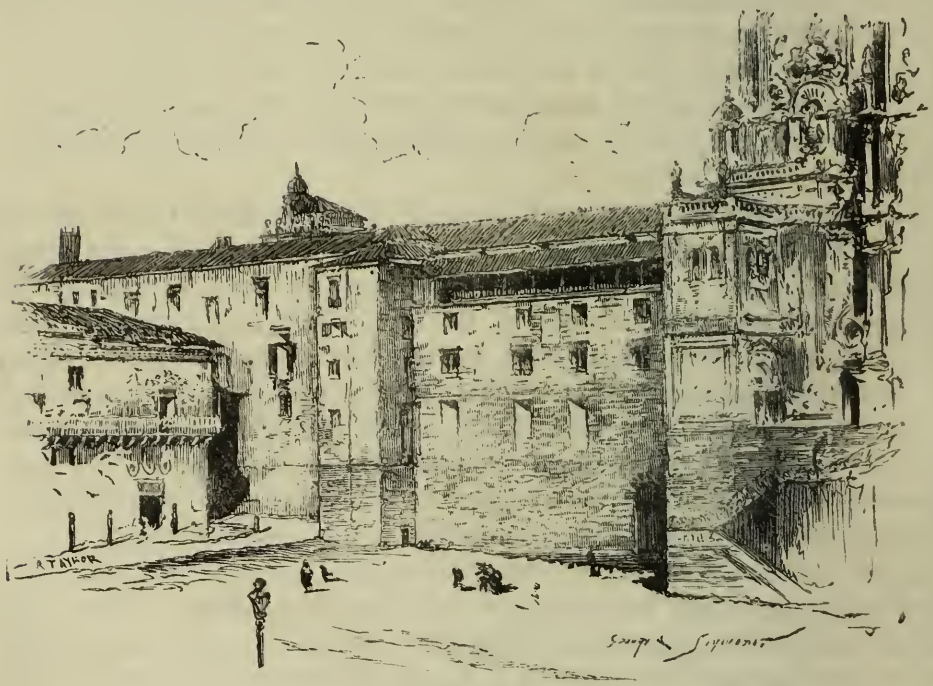
We mounted the steps, so often trod by pilgrims, to gaze at the wonderful image and shrine. A countless host has worn them smooth and small in their eagerness to kiss the hood of the figure: the great object and culminating point of their ambulations. The figure itself is said to be of stone, but little of it was visible. Passing on, we went the round of the chapels and saw the relics and the shrines, the massive plate and the figures of the numerous saints and patrons. But no part was so beautiful as the interior of the west entrance, consisting of three arches, the design representing the Last Judgment, executed by Maestro Matteo in the twelfth century.

From this we entered the chapter house, and passed into the chamber once used for purposes of the Inquisition. Here the council would sit; here the victims would be examined and placed on the preliminary rack for the purpose of bending them to the will of their tormentors. And those who know anything of the Spanish disposition, which still rejoices in the sight of animal suffering and the chancing of human life, can realise something of the lengths to which the Inquisition carried its cruelties.

The walls of the room were padded and massive, the windows deep. No sound of debate, or confession, or the cries of the tortured could escape. Later on it was used as a royal bedchamber, and is still hung with the tapestry that then decorated the walls. All trace of its previous office has disappeared; but there is an atmosphere that must cling to it for ever. Imagination sees the council at its work, stern, cruel and relentless in character and mission. The rack occupies the middle of the chamber; its prey, pale, yet firm before the judges. He refuses their bidding, and is placed on the dread instrument. You hear the creaking of the machinery as it is slowly set in motion; one turn and yet another, until the agony is complete.

The sighs of the victim lurk in the corners of the room; groans and shrieks escape upwards to Heaven and cry aloud for vengeance; but there is no pity in the hearts of those torturers, no response beyond a savage pleasure and purpose betrayed by the kindling glance, the parting of cruel lips, the gleam of white teeth. And some, with whom the spirit, indeed, was willing but the flesh was weak, yielded; and some suffered to the bitter end.

Yes, the place was haunted; doubly haunted. A thousand pale ghosts were there; the room was full of them. Through every pane of glass in the mullioned windows there peered the phantom eyes of a martyr. Centuries have passed since these things were done, yet their horrors are as distinct as if but of yesterday; as present as they



IN THE SQUARE.

will be on that day when the secrets of all hearts shall be brought to light.

No one lingered very long in this tapestry room. Re-entering the cathedral, the great west gates, magnificent in size, age, workmanship, and in their triple character, were thrown open, and we all passed out to the steps fronting the great square.

Standing at the head of the long, broad flight, you beheld a grand and unusual scene. Overshadowing us, as it were, was the building we had just left, its impression upon the mind yet remaining. At that moment only one thing seemed wanting to complete the charm. The organ that, on each side the chancel, in its double frame, crowned so well the splendid old stalls and the Archbishop's throne, should have pealed forth the "swelling anthem." A flood of harmony streaming down the aisles, and reverberating amongst the arches, and

filling all the outside air, would have thrilled the listeners with a more wholesome rapture than ever was felt by pilgrim on kissing the hood of St. James. But, throughout our visit, the silent organ was an oversight and a disappointment.

One other thing might have been done. The famous bells of Santiago should have rung and rocked from the cathedral towers, and sent forth such a peal as the inhabitants had never before heard. Seldom is the city honoured with the presence of Princes of the House of England, and all the sounds of rejoicing that turn an ordinary day into a festival should have commemorated this visit.

COLLEGE.

Probably the authorities of Santiago think less of their organ and their chimes than does anyone else; and if they happen to dislike music, it might not even occur to them to sound the loud timbrel or strike the living lyre. Perhaps, too, the organist was absent, and the ringers were sleeping. Probably, also, few felt the oppressive silence of the belfry and the magic reeds, save a small number, whose heart, wrapped in music, had long been taken captive by St. Cecilia.

The remaining three sides of the square were composed of three large buildings. Before us, the seminary for the education of young priests; to the left, the college of St. Jerome; to the right, the hospital founded, in 1504, by Ferdinand and Isabella, for the use of pilgrims. One can imagine the motley group these now ancient walls frequently enclosed.

The front of the hospital is yet more hoary-looking than the cathedral: a delicious bit of antiquity that might have existed in the days of St. James himself. Gray and green, black and crumbling; intact, yet looking ruinous. As I have said, this effect is due less to age than atmosphere. It is in part a delusion, but a delusion that is all gain to the visitor.

We crossed the square, a long procession, and entered the hospital. For a moment, owing to a wrong impression, I thought we were visiting the college, and prepared for a feast of reason and a flow of soul.

Through an open court into a chapel; richly ornamented, but out of harmony with the severe simplicity one expects from a body of grave University men. Then up a wide staircase, plain and unadorned. Here, at any rate, was austerity enough. Now, thought I, for the intellectual banquet: for grand rooms lined with ancient and interesting tomes: for learned men who will explain all that is mystery and indicate all that is marvel: for illuminated MSS. and rare missals worth almost the ransom of a St. Iago. Now for a priceless half hour spent amid the buried centuries and giant minds of the past. This shall be a time well devoted, long remembered.

And then I awoke to realities: a greater shock, perhaps, for being so unprepared. Details of the hospital ward are unnecessary; but it was many days before a painful impression could be dismissed from the mind and the imagination. A few moments sufficed for the visit. There should be no further chance of shocks, surprises, or disappointments; no more inspections. We fell away from the group, which passed through the doors of the seminary and disappeared.

Pyramid, Oxford and I were now left standing in the middle of the square. It was being repaired, and great blocks of stone, lying about, added no little to its general aspect of ruin and desolation. For a moment, giving ourselves up to our surroundings, we were lost in a magnificent contemplation. To the right of the cathedral was the fine front of the chapter-house; and beyond, the windows of the Room of the Inquisition—as we will here call it. To the left, the archbishop's palace, ancient looking as the church itself, formed the corner of the square.

But passing time and decaying buildings reminded one also of perishing human nature, which needs constant replenishment if the lamp is to be kept burning. So, insensibly, we wended our way past the palace, up the narrow, hilly street, between the heavy arcades that veiled the shops they in no way adorned. Our destination was the Fonda Suiza, and we should probably have found it difficult to thread the intricate mazes leading to the desired haven, but for a gentleman of Santiago; a good Samaritan; an Englishman actually, but a Spaniard for all practical purposes. Without his escort, for the remaining hours of our stay we had been cast adrift.

Aided by our guide, philosopher and friend, we soon found our-

selves within the walls of the Fonda Suiza. To have our modest wants in any degree attended to was another matter. It is often difficult to be served in an hotel in Spain; but to-day the landlord and waiters of the inn were beside themselves.

Table d'hôte was nearly over in the long dining-room; and some of the Officers of the Fleet, less on buildings than on pleasure bent, were doing justice to an excellent repast. For ourselves, we went into a small side-room, and there, by dint of occasionally shaking up the waiters, now bribing the bustling little host with entreaties, and now threatening to bombard him with the Fleet, we finally found ourselves—not exactly in clover, but, like Ruth, gleaning; though not in cornfields. Even our gleanings would have been meagre enough—a sort of Barmecide's feast—but for our Mentor, who came down upon them with the lightning shafts of their own language, and gave them no peace until they would listen to reason.

Altogether it was a little insight into Spanish life, manners and character, amusing and instructive. I should like some day again to pay just such a flying visit, under similar circumstances to Santiago, the cathedral, and the Fonda Suiza. But how often in life do our pleasant days and experiences repeat themselves?

Tiffin over, and the landlord's just claims discharged, we had still some time to spare, and sallied forth. As usual, the door was thronged with beggars, and getting clear of these, we found ourselves in the quiet streets of Santiago. There was not much to be seen here. The shops, small and indifferent, were smothered by the arcades. We entered a typical one out of curiosity: a fan depôt: and gazed at its marvels of art and cheapness. Again we wanted the Princess Scheharazade's help in this delicate matter, but, alas, we had no slave of the lamp to produce her at our bidding.

Pyramid selected one, gorgeous in gold and black, representing a harem of ladies with languishing eyes; chose it simply because one amongst these "lights" was the facsimile of the damsel who, at Arosa Bay (a more romantic name than Carril, and better suited to our theme) had thrown him the lily: emblem, we will devoutly hope, of the lady's heart and intentions. Oxford and I, sighing in vain for lilies, had no such inducement for selection, and took quiet subjects, where little shepherdesses led pet lambs by a pink leash, and elderly dévotes knelt at a confessional, and yellow buttercups bloomed on amber satin.

We were much applauded for our taste on getting back to the *Defence:* for the officers were nearly all of simple habits and cultivated a rigid tone of morality and decorum. And when the pet lambs and shepherdesses, just for fun, were put up at a mock auction, they reached a figure that would have bought a dozen fans in Santiago. Pyramid's, on the other hand, was voted voluptuous, and calculated to endanger the high standard of our minds. (I knew his motive for buying it, which put quite a different colouring on the affair, but

I could not betray his confidence.) A serious consultation ensued as to whether he should not be voted the Black Sheep of the ward-room; but this being his first offence (in the way of fans), the matter was condoned on condition that the article should not again be brought forward. The committee then broke up, and, with the help of the windsail, the atmosphere of the ward-room was changed.

That afternoon in Santiago, we spent some time, as well as money, in the fan-shop—as may be supposed: then crossed over to the club. Here we inspected the ball-room, where Spanish beauties flash their bright glances and flirt their own fans at susceptible Dons, and behave in an altogether light and frivolous fashion, after the manner of human nature: just as if Santiago de Compostella were an ordinary town: instead of being surrounded by an atmosphere steeped in the odour of sanctity, with streets pilgrim-worn and Pope-blessed, and protected by the lofty image of St. James the Elder.

There was little to see beyond: and we had no time left for exploring, and less desire. So, in the sober hours of the afternoon, we turned towards the station, through the blooming Public Gardens that crowned the hill, gorgeous and gay with flowers; down the white dusty road, now comparatively deserted; finally finding ourselves on the platform. The train waited. Ere long we were steaming over the viaduct; admiring the position of the town; again watching the transformation; noting the fine effect of the cathedral towers that stood out against a sky so blue, so ethereal, so transparent. Then, passing on, we lost sight of all that recalled Santiago.

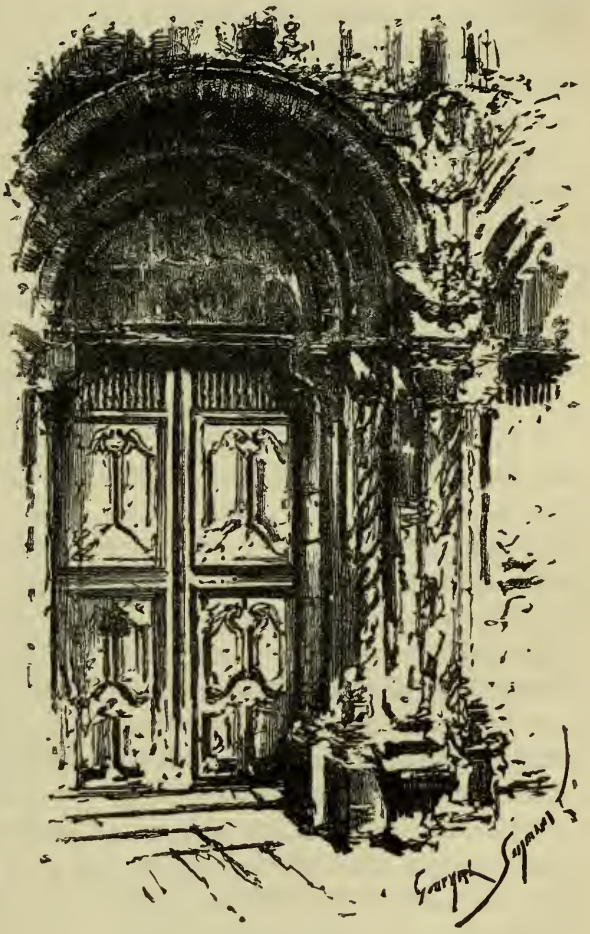
Once more bound for Carril. Through the undulating scenery, with its olive groves and palm trees and long stretches of aloes. But the train this evening was in a slow and stately mood, and we three were in a hurry; Pyramid especially, who was under an engagement to dine that night with Captain Jago, and whose hour was approaching. Therefore, when the train stopped within two hundred yards of the station: and so much nearer the pier where the steam pinnace of the *Defence* was in waiting: we three got out, crossed the lines, and reached our boat almost before the train had slowly puffed into Carril.

The full glare of day had left earth and sky; the sun was declining; a cool breeze—the usual evening experience—had sprung up; the surrounding calm and quiet were conspicuous after our late hours in the Holy City. Santiago de Compostella, perhaps, for our especial benefit, had overspread these waters with the sanctity of its religious atmosphere. The eight vessels of the Fleet, riding at anchor in the landlocked waters of Arosa Bay, looked dignified, and worthy of England. And our credit was saved by our manœuvre. As we stepped on board, the first bugle sounded, and instead of being half-an-hour behind time, we had fifteen minutes to spare for shifting into war paint.

During the cruise each vessel has to be inspected once by the

Admiral: and Thursday morning had been appointed for the *Defence* —the first inspection since leaving England. As the Admiral's barge was seen to leave the Flag-ship, the blue jackets were ordered aloft to man the yards, and on his coming over the gangway, he was received by a guard of marines and all the officers. After a minute inspection of the crew and ship, the Admiral ordered the ship to be cleared for action, which was done with a silence and rapidity that to an outsider seems akin to magic. After a short exercise with the heavy guns, the inspection ended, the Admiral leaving with the usual salute, and with that show of courtesy and kindness on his part for which all the members of our Royal Family are so remarkable.

That afternoon, our last in Arosa Bay, we again landed. The full complement of fruit-women gazed at us "with a mute affection," ready to offer their wares in willing sacrifice. But we had grown accustomed to this kind of adoration, and passed it by unheeding. The Fleur-de-lys was, alas, invisible. Probably the savage parent or duenna who had discovered Tuesday's rash proceeding had shut her up in a tower until the safe departure of the Fleet. The streets, in consequence, looked more woe-begone and dilapidated than ever.



WEST GATES.

So, four of us wandered up a hill to the right, until we came to a large, ancient building. The great doorway was open, and through a deep arch we perceived a garden beyond. The glimpse was too alluring to withstand, and, entering, we found ourselves in a small Paradise. Immense flower beds abounded, full of loveliest blooms, the double geranium brilliant above all. Avenues of over-arching trees shut out the blaze of the sun. The house looked tenantless, the rooms deserted, the garden wild and abandoned. But what a lovely wilderness, and what a glorious abandonment! We sauntered

under the spreading trees, reposed in the shade, revelled in the flowers.

At the extremity of the garden we suddenly faced the blue waters of the bay. The land stretched round in a circle of wavy hills and undulations. The ships of war lay at anchor in this fair setting, the *Defence* easily distinguished by her light water line, and as having the prettiest stern of the whole Squadron. The air was light and ethereal: the sky a blue we dream of in England, but never see. Existence was a pleasure, in such a spot almost a rapture. One might linger here for days and weeks, and never count the hours.

Suddenly a vision of fair girls completed the picture. Advancing, they caught sight of us, started, stood still for a moment like frightened deer; then, suddenly seeing Pyramid, hurried forward. None of the daughters of Eve could ever resist Pyramid. These belonged to the garden and the house, and made us welcome. Happily they spoke French, and we were able to dispense with signs. They picked us large bouquets of choicest flowers, and, later, on bidding them farewell, dismissed us laden with marks of their goodwill and charmed with the Spanish temperament, so simple and so confiding Hospitality with the Spanish is almost an article of religion, and here we had found it in its most attractive form.

It was our last visit on shore; our last reminiscence of Arosa Bay; one that dwelt long in the mind, and formed the topic of much pleasant and dreamy conversation. We had found a little Eden; half wild, half cultivated, wholly charming. A bower of roses that wanted only the nightingale's song to make it perfect. Yet scarcely that; for rippling laughter and dulcet notes came from the throats of the fair human nightingales that suddenly had appeared in the groves. We are still memory-haunted by the scent of the flowers and their brilliant hues, the murmuring of the trees that cast us their grateful shade; haunted by soft breezes laden with silvery voices, and sparkling eyes that flashed, and pleasant words that greeted the intruders and made them welcome. So that, on leaving the garden, I found myself the only sober-minded and responsible member of a party intoxicated with a fine frenzy of extravagant delight.

It was in Arosa Bay that Captain Jago amused himself and others at my expense. And as "I hold it truth with him who sings," that an historian should state the whole of his case even to his own cost, I give the brief record. I had been fitted up on board with a swinging cot, as being more comfortable than a berth; whether it is so or not is a matter of opinion; mine is in favour of the latter. "If you have a fixed berth," said Captain Jago to me one day, "the rolls remain in your head; but if you have a cot, they remain in the cot." I never found it so. Unaccustomed to this moveable arrangement, which is really never still for a moment, my first night on board was an experience.

When the time for retiring arrived, I endeavoured to get into my

cot with the help of a chair; but the more I tried, the more the oscillating thing went from me. In vain I made desperate plunges. The ship was not perfectly steady, and now the cot slipped away with a lurch, and now the chair went sliding backwards. It was a very disagreeable sensation. At last, in some miraculous manner, I found myself safely packed, and then discovered that the cot, not having been evenly slung, was lopsided. This would have been enough to upset one even on shore. When at length I slept, I was haunted by dreams of shipwrecks, battles, and a thousand other ills. In the midst of a tremendous scene of fire and carnage, I started up, and the crooked cot pitched me out head first with an alarming crash. How I got in again, whether whole or in pieces, I never knew. But the Captain was highly amused at what had gone nigh to prove my end. So closely allied in this life are tragedy and comedy.

One night Captain Jago was dining with the Admiral on board the Flag Ship. In the course of conversation with the Duke of Connaught, he was cruel enough to mention the ill fate that had befallen me a few days ago. Anything ludicrous in the misfortunes of our friends makes us laugh in spite of ourselves.

"How came he to do that?" asked the Duke of Connaught.

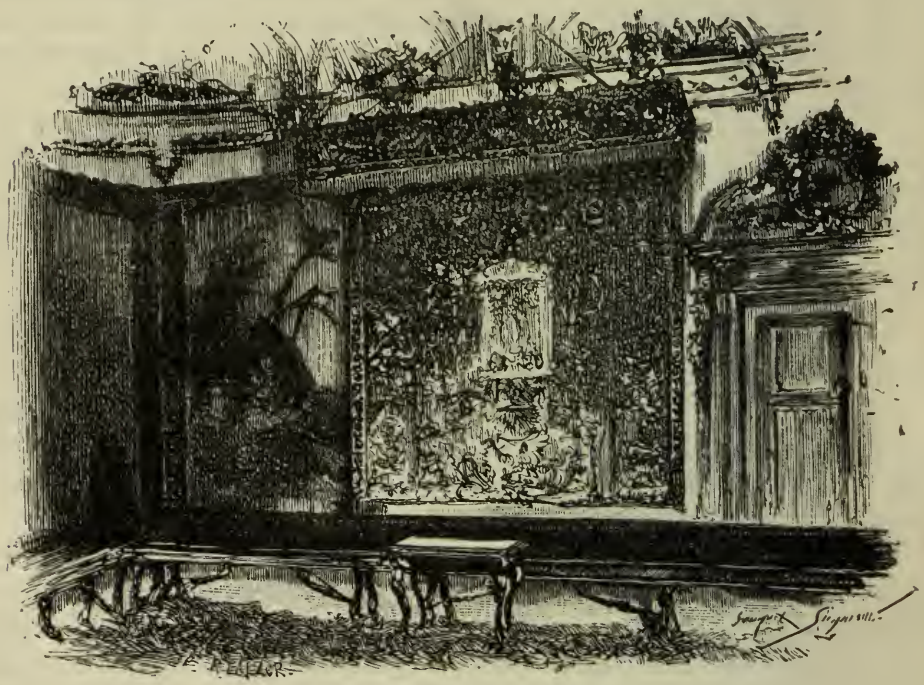
"I really hardly know," replied Captain Jago; "but, at the time, I believe *he was saying his prayers.*"

There was now much merriment at my cost. But the next day, going on board the Flag-ship to record my name in the Admiral's Visitors' Book, I was careful to leave behind me a true and correct version of this "perverted incident."

That same afternoon, when we were revelling in the shady groves of that Arosa Paradise, all our laughter had nearly been changed to mourning. The Admiral, who had gone some miles up the country to fish, fell into the weir. For nearly half an hour he was in the water, and sank and rose four times. He had given up hope, and perhaps no one else in the whole Fleet would have had any chance of life: but few are so much at home in the water as His Royal Highness. Finally, as we know, he was saved. It did not do to think of what might have been. A cruise cut short. A return to England almost before we had left her shores: a sad and solemn return indeed. A sort of Dead March across the waters of the ocean; a hushed and mournful squadron; flags half-mast high. A good Providence ruled it otherwise, and great was the rejoicing.

The *Defence* and *Valiant* had not fired their quarter's allowance of ammunition on joining the squadron, and were in consequence ordered to sea at 6.0 a.m., the day of sailing from Arosa, with instructions to carry out their Target-practice and rejoin the Squadron in the evening. In full sunshine the two vessels steamed away between the undulating hills and low-lying shores. Once out on the broad sea, we commenced firing. As ill-luck had it, I was more

than half dead that day with headache. The previous night, the M.B. had had a select "Small and Early" in his cabin, for purposes of Discussion. The warmth of the debate, carried on to the last moment permitted by the regulations, had utterly banished sleep. If the amiable M.B. had a fault, it was his love of argument: and the deeper the subject, the longer would he delight in keeping the ball rolling. That night the subject had not been deep at all. In opening the debate, he had stated it in the following terms: "How far the growing movement of the Salvation Army was likely to influence the morals of the next generation." Not at all an abstruse proposition, but concerning which everyone had profound and distinct convictions, and an immense deal to say.



ROOM OF THE INQUISITION.

The next morning, every time a gun was fired and shook the vessel to its centre, I fancied, in a half delirium, that my head was the big drum with which the Salvation Army delights to head its processions, and that it was being beaten with a determination which might be Christian but was certainly muscular. The firing continued for some hours, until we had expended our quarter's ammunition, and finished up with a torpedo. One moment, the target was in the midst of the waters; the next, it had disappeared in a shower of spray. Quietness brought relief, and though feeling very much like the shattered target, I recovered sufficiently, and just in time, to keep my dinner engagement with one of the kindest, most courteous, and most hospitable men that ever commanded a man of war.

By that time we had rejoined the Squadron and were on our way to Gibraltar, yet shorn of one of our vessels. The *Penelope* had

proceeded under orders to the East. Henceforth our number was represented by the mystic numeral. In an unbroken line of four on one side, and an incomplete one of three on the other, we steered for the blue waters of the Mediterranean. Next month, dear reader, I hope we may cruise through the Straits together.

A LITTLE ROOM.

THE room was very small and bare:
  Its low and empty walls were brown;
No magic touch of art was there
  To bring the country to the town:
And all the beauty it could show,
Were six sweet myrtles in a row!

Now, while I stir not from my chair,
  My heart to that poor room will steal;
A sense of summer time is there,
  A myrtle-scented breath I feel:
I hear again the passing cry,
"Roses a-blowing! Who will buy?"

What made that low room all so dear?
  A vanished face, a tender tone,
Whose music I shall never hear
  While life's long dusk I spend alone.
Our love, I know, is still the same,
But who can guess its new-made frame?

And so, when dreaming on my seat,
  My soul seeks New Jerusalem town,
It always seems her weary feet
  Regain that chamber bare and brown:
And God's own glory seems to glow
On myrtles, standing in a row!

I know quite well that cannot be:
  (Yet sometimes parables are true!)
But it must stand for Heaven to me:
  A haven in God's boundless blue;
Where Love finds anchorage, while wide
God's sea of love rolls every side!

I. F. M.

MY SATURDAYS.

HOW SHE ATONED.

I.

I WAS in St. George's Chapel at Windsor one week-day afternoon. I had not been at service there before, and I did not know how to obtain a seat at the side, under the Knights' stalls; so I modestly sat me down on one of the benches in the aisle. The side seats were occupied by a sprinkling of ladies, evidently habituées; and a few gentlemen sat in the stalls above.

As I ran a glance along the rows, I was suddenly caught and stopped by a pair of eyes. Eyes, and no more: the high bench prevented my seeing the face below; the eyes themselves would let me see nothing above. Such eyes! large, dark enough to seem black —but with a depth in them which black eyes never have, underlined with purple shades, and bordered with the light, sad tracings that tell tales. Not beautiful eyes, at all, having no charm of shape or setting; but weary, melancholy, yearning eyes. Eyes to beset your thoughts by day, and haunt your dreams by night. Eyes that had wept comfortlessly over some great sorrow; eyes that ached to pierce some unfathomable mystery. They met my own, but I saw that they took no note of me. I was not what they sought, and they cared for nothing else. "What *have* they seen?" I wondered, with a shiver; "and oh! what are they waiting to see?"

Presently the service began, and we all stood up. Then I saw that the eyes belonged to a woman still young, though not a girl. There was nothing beautiful or striking about the rest of her face, but she was evidently a lady; and indeed I soon perceived that she was with some acquaintances of mine who lived in the neighbourhood. I tried hard not to stare at her, and to keep both my own eyes and my attention fixed on my book; but hers were too much for me, and I found myself constantly looking at her again, in a fascinated sort of way. I was glad when the service ended, and then, of course, the first thing I did was to join her companions in the court outside, and be introduced to her. It was very ridiculous—a woman of my age to be caught by a pair of dark eyes, like a boy of eighteen; but I could not help it. It was not that I thought her particularly attractive, for I did not; but she was a mystery, and I must know something of her.

In time I came to know something about her: I change the preposition, for her real self—whatever it was—only looked out veiled through those wonderful eyes, and I was as far from solving the mystery as I had been the first day I saw her. Her name was Lena Graham, and she had no near relations living. She had a small

income, enough to save her from the necessity of earning her bread: visited her uncles, aunts, and cousins, whenever she was asked, which was reasonably often; and in a general way, seemed to be nothing particular, and to do nothing particular.

"I have her down here whenever I can," her aunt, Mrs. Neville, explained to me that day at Windsor, when I had gone home with them to afternoon tea; "because it really is a lonely life for her. But it is a good deal of a gêne, for she isn't lively or amusing at all, and the girls don't care for her. And then she has no pursuits, except this dreadful spiritualism, which makes me so nervous."

"You don't have séances?"

"Oh, no. I wouldn't have such a thing in the house on any account; I think it is quite wicked; and Lena knows that I disapprove, and, to do her justice, she has never talked to the girls about it, or tried to set it going at all. But I know she visits horrid places in London where they have dark séances, and all sorts of things; and I'm always afraid that she will set us all distracted."

"It is a pity she hasn't something better to occupy her mind."

"So I always say. Now, the Vicar wanted my girls to take a district here; he even went so far as to ask Marian to teach in a night school; and of course I could not allow that. They would be sure to catch fevers in those dirty houses, and altogether, it wouldn't do. I tell them their home duties are enough for them. But Lena, now, might quite give herself up to charity, and it would be so nice for her."

"Everybody is not inclined to self-devotion, though, even when they have nothing better to do with themselves. Does not Miss Graham care for music or reading?"

"That's another provoking thing. Lena has a lovely voice; she used to give hours to music at one time; but no one ever hears her now, except sometimes a little at Church. She gave it all up, and went in for study. She wanted to take a degree, I think, or something of the sort. Very absurd, I always told her. The mere idea of a girl being a Bachelor, you know, is so ridiculous. When they can't even find a sensible name for the thing, it must be against nature. But I really wish now I had encouraged her, for after a time she gave all that up, too; and at any rate it was better than moping and spirit-rapping."

"Do you know how she came to take up spiritualism?"

"Well, I fancy it had something to do with her little brother's death. He was her step-brother, a great many years younger. She was quite grown-up when it happened; they were living together at some boarding-house in London. She took it greatly to heart; I think it was then that she gave up her books, and took to all these fancies. I know we were surprised to see how she felt it; we never thought she cared much about little Joso when he was alive."

I thought that I had got the clue to Miss Graham's melancholy, then, though it seemed strange that one such sorrow should lay waste a life; but no further light was thrown upon her history, though I

saw her a good many times that summer. It turned out that she had been at school with Charlotte Stamwood, and that she was a connection of Mrs. Villiers, and had seen a good deal of Imogen at her house. So I persuaded Mrs. Neville to make an expedition, and bring her over to one of my Saturday afternoon teas, to renew her old acquaintances.

Charlotte came specially to meet her, and the result was that when she had finished her visit at Windsor, she came for a time to Tamston Rectory. Imogen was up and down, often spending a couple of days with me (of which Archie got more benefit than I did), and when she was at liberty, Miss Graham came in to see her, or they took walks together. In one way or another, I managed to see a great deal of her, but knew her very little better. We had plenty of interesting talk, for she was intelligent and well-informed; but she never responded to that half-speculative, half-personal talk about feelings and qualities and characteristics, through which women so easily drift into self-revelation. She might have warmed apropos of spiritualism, but I was afraid of the subject, and always avoided it, until that rainy Saturday, when Captain Perth was the object of a mahogany vengeance.* I was not at all pleased with the part she had taken in the affair; but I had asked her in the morning to stay to dine and spend the evening, and though I had been annoyed and frightened, and generally upset, I could not send her away.

The days were growing shorter, and we had dinner late, to suit Archie, so that there was a twilight half-hour before that event. The lovers had disappeared, and when I came into the drawing-room I found Lena Graham in sole possession of it. She was walking up and down with her hands behind her, her great black eyes looking larger and blacker than ever in the dusk. She turned to me quickly as I came in.

"I am so glad you have come," she said, eagerly. "I want you to tell me all about them."

"About whom?"

"Captain Perth, of course, and his wife. I know he was cruel to her. Did he beat her?"

"No; certainly not."

"Did he starve her? did he neglect her? did he leave her to shiver with cold, and pine, and die?" she went on, absolutely glaring into my face.

"Not at all," I answered. "What ideas have you taken up about these people? They were my neighbours, and Captain Perth was my guest to-day. I don't want to gossip about his affairs, and I am very sorry that anything unpleasant has happened to him in my house."

"I know there was something wrong," she persisted, "though you don't want to tell me. How did Mrs. Perth die?"

* See "Poor Mrs. Perth," Argosy, December, 1882.

"Very suddenly, from heart disease."

"Heart disease?" she said, contemptuously. "He killed her. I knew it. He is a murderer; but he will be punished. His punishment begins to-day, and I have helped to begin it. I am glad."

"You know nothing about it," I answered, growing angry. "Captain and Mrs. Perth were always on very good terms; and if they were not, what business is it of yours?"

"On good terms?" she repeated again, with a harsh laugh. "That means that she bore it, and said nothing about it. You needn't try to humbug me; the spirits tell the truth. What business is it of mine? Well, none, perhaps; but it's my pleasure. I like to see cruel people punished; and he was cruel. I am punished; why shouldn't he be?"

"You?"

"Oh, yes, I. Don't I look like it? Don't I look like a woman who is cursed, and haunted, and driven mad and desperate, till her only pleasure is to see the same justice done on others who have been as bad? Don't I?"

She did look so awfully like it as she clutched my arm and shook it, her eyes widening and widening, with green gleams on them like a wild creature's, that I thought for a moment she was going mad. I sought about for something to say to calm her.

"Sometimes people are punished in this life for their good, that they may escape worse hereafter," I ventured, not feeling very sure of my ground.

"Do you think so, Mrs. Singleton? oh, do you think so? Do you think one can have one's torment in this life, and not in the next?"

"My dear," I said, "these are awful questions. I can't answer them. You had better talk to a clergyman if you have anything on your mind."

"I can't. I can't talk to anybody. I never said a word before. I don't know how I came to say anything now. I ought to hold my tongue."

"No," I said, boldly. "You have held your tongue long enough, and it is killing you. Tell me all about it. If I can't help you, perhaps I can comfort you."

"Comfort me, you good creature! *You* comfort me! And you want me to tell you! What would you say if I did tell you? What would you say if you heard that I was a murderess?"

"I should say that I didn't believe it."

"But it is true. Oh, it is true! And yet I never meant it—I never meant it!"

She dropped in a heap on the ground, clutching the arm of a chair in her hands, and burying her face in her arms. Her breath came in long-drawn gasps, that were almost groans. I knelt on the floor beside her, and laid my hand on her shoulder. She shivered away from it.

"Tell me," I said.

"It was Joso—my little brother Joso. We were alone in the world: he had no father or mother, nobody but me. He was fond of me: he used to put his arms round my neck and I would sing to him. He liked to hear me sing. You asked me to sing once: now you know why I can't." She stopped for a minute, then went on with breaks and fitful pauses. I dared not interrupt or question her.

"Then I took to studying for a degree. I thought of nothing else. There was a maid to look after Joso; I had no time to attend to him. He got thin and sick; I did not notice it at first; then I got a doctor for him, and paid for his physic. I couldn't see that he had it, you know; I was too busy. It takes a lot of time to be a Bachelor." She laughed a horrid little laugh.

"I heard all about it afterwards from the people of the house. They never told me when I might have saved him. The maid neglected him—as I did. She went out for hours, or sat down in the kitchen, gossiping, and he was left alone. He used to stand at the window for half the day, with his face against the glass—so lonely. She didn't give him his medicine, or see to his food. Neither did I; I was too busy. Sometimes, of course, I saw him; I remember he asked me to sing to him, and I wouldn't. I was tired, or didn't want to be bothered. Then he got a cough. It was a bitter winter, and the woman used to stay away, and let the fire out; and he was there, by himself, in the cold. One evening I went up to his room. It was all dark; there was no fire or light; and he was sitting in a corner, crying quietly to himself. I took him up; he was half-frozen. Then he began to cough dreadfully, and when I took him down into my own warm room, I saw how thin and wretched he was. I did everything I could for him then, when it was too late. He died in about a fortnight. He had starved, and pined, and frozen to death upstairs, while I sat below with my fire and my books, and never thought of him. He was my charge, my brother; he had nobody but me; and I let him die."

I could not speak.

"When he was gone, I was nearly mad," she went on. "I wanted to speak to him, to tell him that I loved him, that I never meant it, that I would give my life to have him back. I thought perhaps he would forgive me: he was such a loving little fellow, not hard and selfish, like me. I heard that one could speak to the spirits and get answers, and I tried. I could do it; they would answer me; but Joso never would. Once or twice, other mediums gave me messages that they said were from him, but I knew they were not true. He would not speak to me. I have tried, and tried, and waited, and called for him; but he would not come; he would not answer. Earth is empty, and Heaven is dumb. I am alone, like Cain. Why not? I murdered my brother, as he did."

"No," I said; "you did not. There cannot be murder without hate. You loved your little brother?"

"I did—I did, indeed," she moaned.

"You love him still?"

"Yes."

"If you could have him back, you would do quite differently?"

"I would give up everything for him."

"Then you repent; and where there is repentance there is forgiveness. You have done Joso no real harm. He is happier now than you could ever have made him, if you had done your very best. When you see him again, you will know that he has forgiven you—that he never knew there was anything to forgive. He is not allowed to speak to you in these ways of your own choosing; but never doubt that he loves you. Some day he will tell you so. And perhaps, even on earth, you may be allowed some way of atoning."

"Oh, how do you think?" she cried, starting up with an eager hope.

"I do not know," I answered. "You must wait and see. But I think there will be a way."

"If there is, I will do it, if it costs my life. Oh, you give me hope. I have known nothing but despair for so long."

"You must not despair any more," I said, putting my arm round her, and kissing her. She gave me one long, passionate kiss, and then fled from the room.

Nobody was surprised that, after the fatigue of a séance, Miss Graham had too bad a headache to keep her engagement to dinner.

II.

We had now come to the end of August, and as often happens in that month, were having an uncomfortable time of wet and chilly weather, which would not have been out of place in October. Garden parties were impossible; my last had been broken up by rain, which drove everyone in-doors, and I determined to issue no more general invitations. But I had announced that I would be at home on all the Saturday afternoons in August; and accordingly, though the last Saturday in that month was cold, showery, and unpleasant, my drawing-room was well filled. I had lit one of the unseasonable fires which Charlotte Stamwood loved—merely a bright crackle of wood and cannel coal; thrown open my little greenhouse door, and moved the plants so as to make room for a couple of chairs, obtained as much space as possible in the drawing-room, arranged tea in the hall—so as to be brought in easily, provided some music, and generally made the best that I could of the circumstances.

Lena Graham was staying with me. After the scene of last Saturday, I could not let her drift away, and she seemed to cling to me, and eagerly accepted my invitation. She took up her quarters

with me on the Friday, and was soon quite at home, and very helpful in all my arrangements.

People collected—as I said—in considerable force, chatted, listened, drank tea, stayed as long as they felt inclined, and went away when they chose. About five o'clock, or a little after, I remember there was a drenching shower of rain, which drove against the glass, and blurred it with sudden streams, and made everything outside look dreary.

"Mrs. Singleton," said Charlotte, spreading out her hands luxuriously to feel the blaze, "do you remember the little fire you had that cold day in May when we first talked about your Saturdays?"

"I remember," I said; "you never would have had courage to broach the idea but for its friendly countenance."

"It convinced me that you possessed the gifts of a hostess," she returned; "and I appeal to the company, whether the result has not justified my predictions. Here we are at the last of Mrs. Singleton's Saturdays—for this year, and have they not been a great success?"

Of course there was an acquiescent chorus of "Perfect," "Delightful, I'm sure," "Quite a new feature in Tamston society," &c. &c., which I interrupted.

"Charlotte, your capacity for 'spreading the butter thick' is such that if you inflict another morsel upon me, I will betray you at the next wedding, and you shall propose the health of the bride and bridegroom. You would be using your vocal powers to much better purpose by singing to us."

"My dear Mrs. Singleton, my feelings would be too much for me: I should break down. What! I, who watched over the cradle of your Saturdays, shall I sing beside their bier? No, seek some lighter heart."

"We have never had the pleasure of hearing Miss Graham," suggested Mrs. Minton, "and I know that she sings *beautifully*."

"You are mistaken, Mrs. Minton," answered Lena quietly; "I do not sing at all."

"Oh, come now, you are too modest; I have heard people quite rave about your voice—in Church, you know. You *might* let us hear it somewhere else, if you are not under a vow."

"I am not under any vow, but I do not practise any songs, and I do not wish to sing."

"You had better not press her, Mrs. Minton," I put in, anxious to save her from being teased; "it would be dangerous, for I should be offended now if she were to sing for anyone else after having refused me."

Lena walked away towards the window-door, which opened upon the lawn. It was shut, of course, and the rain had been beating against it; but that was over now. As my eyes followed her, we both saw at the same moment, a little face close to the glass. A pale, dirty, miserable little face, belonging to a ragged child apparently about

five years old. I opened the window, and asked him—very unnecessarily—what he wanted.

"Please, lady, gi' me a copper," he said, with the whine of a born and trained beggar. Lena had followed me to the window, and before I could say anything, the child looked up in her face, and said in a more natural tone:

"I'm so cold!"

In a moment she had pushed past me, and had taken his little purple hands in hers.

"So he is, poor little fellow; he's frozen, and soaked with the rain. Oh, Mrs. Singleton, mayn't I bring him in and warm him?"

I hope I shall be forgiven if I hesitated for one minute, when I thought of Susan. Susan is an excellent cook, and a good-hearted woman, but she can be so unpleasant when she is in a temper! And probably the child's mother was a thief, just waiting round the corner for a chance to get into the house.

"Where is your mother, my child?" I asked.

"Don't know," he said, pitifully. "I'm so cold." And just then he began to cough violently.

Lena waited for no permission. She gathered the dirty little creature up in her arms, and carried him straight through the drawing-room, and into the kitchen. There she sat down with him before the fire, petting and soothing him until the coughing-fit was over. I followed, and made explanations to the astonished servants.

Fortunately, Susan's good heart was uppermost this evening; and, indeed, the thin, chilled little limbs and swollen hands and feet would have moved the hardest to pity. Charlotte Stamwood had come in with me, and I turned to her for counsel, as she was well accustomed to poor children. All her nonsense was gone in a minute, and she was strictly practical.

"He looks very ill," she said; "and every minute he sits in those wet clothes is making him worse. You'd better take them off, and give him a hot bath at once, and I'll run home and fetch some things for him. There was a parcel of children's old clothes sent us yesterday, for giving away, and some of them will be sure to fit him. You can wrap him up in a blanket till I come back. Then he can be taken to the infirmary." And she departed without delay.

It was rather dismaying. A dirty little beggar, with not a rag on him that was fit to be touched with a pair of tongs, to be bathed and dressed! I thought myself a fairly charitable woman, as people go, but I own that I did not know how to set about this piece of work.

"Please let me see to him," said Lena. "You have all those people to attend to, and Susan will help me to make him warm and comfortable."

Accordingly I returned to my guests, who were a good deal amazed at Miss Graham's sudden burst of Quixotic benevolence.

"Not in the least *like* her, you know," said Mrs. Minton. "I

happen to know that it would have been quite a *pleasure* to her dear aunt to see her become a Sister of Charity, or something of the sort: but she never would take the least interest in the poor."

"She didn't care about being charitable to order, I suppose," snapped Lady Jacobs, who was always in a chronic state of polite hostilities with Mrs. Minton. "My dear"—to me—"I shall take myself off. I expect you will want to see what your enthusiast is doing with her waif."

This broad hint was soon taken by the rest of the company, and it was not very long before I was able to go and see how matters were progressing in the kitchen. As I entered, I suddenly remembered the scene of that day week, and the half-mad woman pacing up and down with gleaming eyes, exulting in some wild witch-like vengeance that she had helped to execute. Now she sat on a low chair, a little back from the fire, wrapped in a soft blue dressing-gown, and in her arms lay her foundling fast asleep. A half-emptied basin of bread-and-milk stood near; the poor little thing had not been able to eat much; but now his sleep was so profound that Susan's movements as she went to and fro about her work, every now and then casting a friendly glance at the little stranger—did not disturb him. Lena looked up at me with such a different expression in her dark eyes! I had not known that they could look soft and loving. "Isn't he a dear little fellow?" she said in a low voice.

Now that he was clean and comfortable, one could see some traces of childish prettiness, and there was something touching in the small pale face. I was able to assent.

"He is like my little Joso," she murmured, looking down at him again fondly. I stood watching them, and presently the child woke. He opened his eyes, and lay taking in his surroundings.

"Are you warm now, dear?" asked Lena.

"Yes," he said, decidedly. "Who are you?"

Lena hesitated. "You may call me Sister," she said.

"Sisters took care of me when my leg was bad. Sister Lucy was jolly: she always gave me lollipops when the doctors came; but Sister Jane said she mustn't. Will you give me some, too?"

"Yes, dear. I'll get you some to-morrow."

"All right. I like being here. Where's your cap?"

"I haven't one, but I can take care of you just as well without."

"Sisters always had caps," said the child, doubtfully. "What's your name?"

"Lena."

"Sister Lena, where's my little bed?"

She gathered him up in her arms, and covered him with kisses. Evidently she had in a moment adopted this little waif of the streets, who might have all sorts of embarrassing antecedents and belongings, to fill the place of her lost brother. It would be a happiness to see

her empty heart so filled and warmed, but I foresaw all sorts of perplexities. Meanwhile, the child's question was pertinent. Lena looked at me. Nobody ventured to suggest the infirmary.

"Mayn't he sleep in my bed?" she said. "He is as clean as any other child now, and I can sleep on the floor."

However, I had a little bed, which I kept for my sister's children when she brought them with her on a visit, and this I moved into Lena's room. There the little fellow, whose name proved to be Tim, was soon settled, and prepared to go to sleep again. He much astonished us by proposing to say his prayers.

"I always said my prayers to Sister Lucy," he observed simply. "I haven't forgot them one bit." And he rattled off one of his childish prayers in a high sing-song.

"Good-night, little Tim," said Lena, tucking him up.

"Good-night, Sister Lena," said little Tim, sleepily.

Of course we talked about our little guest while we were having our tea, speculated upon his history, wondered at his partial civilisation, exchanged commonplaces on the benefits of hospitals, and drifted into a discussion on sisterhoods. But what was to become of little Tim, either to-morrow or afterwards, was a question of which we carefully steered clear as long as cups and saucers and edibles restricted the conversation to conventionalities. When we went into the drawing-room, Lena sat down to the piano, and played several of the sweetest of the Lieder ohne Worte, until a sound upstairs called her away to see to her charge. After a time, she returned.

"He was awake then," she said, "and just coughed once or twice, but not nearly so badly as he did before. I am sure he is better already. He only wants food and warmth and care."

"Just what he has never had."

"He shall have them in future, then."

"My dear, how are you going to secure that?"

"I will take care of him. I have enough for both of us."

"But his mother may come back and claim him."

"It is not likely; she seems to have deserted him. And as soon as he is well I will take him back to London, and if she does come back for him, you need not give her my address."

"Why, you want to make me an accomplice in kidnapping a child from its mother!"

"Mother! She does not deserve the name. What sort of a mother can she be who leaves a little thing like that? Oh, indeed! I ought not to say a word, I know. I don't forget: no wonder you don't think me fit to have the charge of him." She broke down, and covered her face with her hands.

"My dear," I said, "I did not mean that in the least. I think you are perfectly fit to have the charge of the child, as far as care goes; my only fear would be that you might spoil him. But I do feel afraid of your setting your heart upon what may not be

possible. If the mother appears, you cannot keep the child from her. If you do keep him, it is a great question whether he will live; he is miserably fragile, and he looks as if he were at the beginning of an illness. And if you do keep him and he does live, he is likely to have inherited all sorts of vicious tendencies, which may make him only a grief to you, if you take him to your own home and heart."

"I have no home, and I thought until to-day that I had no heart," she answered sadly. "But now—oh, Mrs. Singleton, don't hinder me. It will be time enough to think of the difficulties when they come. There is no difficulty in my nursing him now; and if we hear nothing of the mother, there will be no difficulty in my taking him away with me."

"I suppose not," I said doubtfully.

"I want him so badly," she went on. "Don't you understand? It is like Joso coming back. There he was, alone and cold, like Joso; and I have taken him in, and warmed and petted him, and I can take care that he shall never want again. I can make him happy, and he shall make me happy. He shall be my little brother; you heard him call me sister?"

"Yes, dear; I knew that you liked it."

"Liked it! It is forgiveness; it is life. You told me there would be a way for me to atone. You were a prophet. Here is the way: I said I would do it, and I will."

Her eyes were bright with resolution and hope. I argued no more, but my heart was full of misgivings.

Early next morning she came to my room to ask me to go and see little Tim, who she feared was worse. He had coughed very little in the night, and now was not coughing at all, but he looked flushed and oppressed. I sent for Dr. Carfield, and was not at all surprised, when he came, to hear that the child was in the first stage of an attack of acute bronchitis, brought on by exposure acting on a weak constitution. When I asked about his chances, the doctor shook his head.

"Children have wonderful stores of vitality, and they sometimes make an unexpected fight for life; but this one doesn't look as if he had much fight in him. His best chance is his being under your roof, Mrs. Singleton. In the workhouse infirmary he would go out in two days, like the snuff of a candle."

"He shall have every care," I said.

"No doubt, no doubt. Very few people, though, would care to take in and nurse a little beggar like that."

"I am looking out for my chance of entertaining an angel unawares," I answered, not quite sure whether I was making a very poor joke or speaking the deepest truth.

Was little Tim an angel in disguise? Poor little man, he was not very angelic himself. He could not talk much, however; he was

too ill, and both breathing and speaking soon became difficult to him. Sometimes he was fretful, but generally the marvellous patience of children carried him through his restless nights and distressed days, without giving any unnecessary trouble to his nurses. And truly, he did an angel's work.

His mother never appeared, and we afterwards learned that she had been taken up for theft, soon after deserting him. Lena and I nursed him between us, she taking the heavier part of the work. It was with difficulty that I could persuade her to take food or rest; of sleep she had little, indeed. She was jealous of my doing anything for him when she was there; and when there was nothing to be done would kneel beside the bed, gazing at him with her great eyes. In the beginning of his illness she used to tell him stories; and I fancied that she would have sung to him, if she could have done so without anyone else hearing. He seemed fond of her, looked to her for everything, and would slide his little hand into hers, and so lie back against his pillows, half dozing, when he had an interval of rest.

But day after day, during that next week, his sufferings increased, and it was pitiful to see his struggles for breath. I longed for his release, and was thankful when it was evident that it could not be much longer delayed. He had no power to fight against illness; strengthening food came too late; and he sank rapidly. Lena never gave up hope. When I told her gently that he could not recover, she only answered: "He will live. He was sent to me that I might atone,"—and turned again to her tendance. It seemed as if her passionate will must keep him alive.

The hour came when she could no longer deceive herself. It was on Saturday evening, just a week after little Tim had come to us. The terrible gasping had ceased, and he lay quiet, breathing little shallow breaths now and then. Lena as usual, knelt by him, Presently his lips moved. She leaned forward to catch the sound: it was only a whisper:—"Sister."

"Yes, dear," she said eagerly. "Sister is here."

But little Tim wanted no more, from her or anyone on earth. The faint breaths grew fainter and fewer, until there was one breath which no other followed. Then I rose, and tried to draw Lena away.

It was a long time before I could induce her to leave the room, and much longer before I could soothe her into any sort of quiet. She had felt the coming of this little stray child as a kind of returning of her little brother, come back to her to be loved and cared for, and to receive her penitence and her atonement. And now her penitence seemed rebuffed, her atonement was frustrated, and she was thrown back again into the loneliness which for a time she had hoped to escape.

At last I persuaded her to go to bed, and then, from sheer exhaustion, she fell into a heavy sleep. By that time it was late, and everyone in the house was more or less worn out, too; so having moved little Tim's bed into an empty room, and done all that could

be done for what it contained, we left the solemn little form alone, and all went to rest.

III.

Somewhere in the heavy middle hours of the night, I was awoke. I knew that I had not waked of my own accord, and my mind felt round confusedly for the cause. Soon I became aware of a strange sweet sound which had been in my ears without reaching my consciousness, and somehow there darted into my mind the beautiful Arabic version of "the still small voice"—"a voice singing in silence." It was a voice—a woman's voice—singing at the dead of night in the silent house. I sat up in bed, and listened stupidly; then collecting my senses, and taking my courage with both hands, I sprang up, struck a light, hurried on dressing-gown and slippers, and went out on the lobby. There I heard the voice quite clearly, coming from downstairs. I cautiously descended, trembling with undefined terror. The voice sang on—a soft low cradle-song: it came from the drawing-room. I went to the door, shading my candle; it was ajar: there was no light within, but I could see a tall white figure moving about, and I pushed the door wide open.

I knew that I should see Lena, and it was she. She did not hear me come, and her back was toward me. She had something in her arms, which she was nursing and fondling; and she was bending her head over it, and singing her lullaby to it. To *it?* To what? She turned, and came towards me, and then I saw. May I never again see anything so awful.

Her great dull black eyes were wide open in her ghastly face, but they saw nothing; she was clothed only for sleep, but she felt no cold; and in her arms she carried little Tim. His fair head drooped over one arm, and his feet over the other; and she walked up and down, crooning her sweet song to the unhearing ears. She did not see me, or anything else, for she never moved her eyes, except when she bent her head sometimes over her burden; yet in some wonderful way she kept clear of all obstacles, and back and forward, back and forward, she moved, her bare feet noiseless on the soft carpet, and the only sound that sweet and terrible singing.

I stood, unable to speak or move, helplessly watching the monotonous pacing of the sleeping woman, as she cradled the dead child in her arms, and tried to soothe the slumber that would never be broken. At last I recovered my self-control, and forced myself to go forward, and touch her. I took her by the arm, and called her by name. She stopped singing.

"Yes," she said, in a strange, far-away voice.

"My dear, what are you doing down here?"

"I am nursing Joso. He is so cold—so cold." And she gathered the poor little body closer to her warm breast.

"Let me take him," I begged, with an inward shiver. "He is too

heavy for you." She did not seem to hear, but tried to go on with her walk.

"Give him to me," I said very distinctly.

"No," she answered, "I must warm him."

"He is cold because he is out of bed," I said. "Come and put him back into his warm bed."

"Put him to bed ——" she repeated vaguely. "Yes; I'll put him to bed."

"Come, then." And with my hand on her arm, I drew her out of the room, and guided her upstairs to the side of the cot out of which she had taken him.

I told her again to put him to bed, and she laid the poor little thing back to rest. Then she tucked it up carefully, and stooped and kissed it.

"Good-night, Joso. Joso is quite warm now."

"Yes," I said, the tears coming beyond my controlling; "he will never be cold any more. Come away, and don't wake him."

She came away quite docilely, and I locked the door, and led her back to her own room.

That was her last sight of little Tim. For seven days he had been a part of her life, and now she was to see him no more on this side of the great mystery into which he had passed. Like a storm-beaten bird, he had flown to her from the outer cold and darkness, and folded his wet and weary wings, and nestled into her bosom; but now he had spread them again for flight into brighter sunshine and purer air.

Lena was not with us when we laid him to sleep in a quiet corner of Tamston churchyard. She had been thoroughly chilled in her wanderings that night, and worn out as she was with her week of excited, unresting nursing, the effects were serious. She had an attack of influenza of the worst sort, which kept her a prisoner to her room for days, and left her as weak as a baby. It was a very good thing, I think. Bodily weakness and discomfort stifled mental pain; illness made a gap, after which she could make a fresh beginning; and all that had happened softened and opened her heart.

When she was recovering, we had many long talks, and grew to love each other very dearly. Lena came to think without bitterness of the failure of her first attempt at atonement, and to form a fairer and more unselfish purpose. She would not again try to win happiness, but only to give comfort. Little Tim had realised to her that there were hundreds of little ones so living and suffering, far more lonely and miserable than ever he had been whom she had so long and fruitlessly mourned. Her heart yearned over them: she had learnt to love again, and now she longed to gather in, and tend and love all who were destitute and uncared-for. She had not enough means to do more independently than she had proposed to do by adopting little Tim, and she shrank from making such an attempt again. After much consideration, she decided to go into training at

one of the London hospitals, and become a professional nurse, in order to give up her life to tending sick children. The experiment proved successful; she developed remarkable talent in her new vocation, and showed such a speciality for the care of the little ones that, after a shorter time than usual, she was placed in charge of a children's ward. There "Sister Lena" was a name of every-day use, but never the less sweet for that to her who had first heard it from the lips of little Tim.

Not very long afterwards she inherited an income which enabled her to give up the hospital, and take a house of her own. It was soon filled with deserted babies and neglected children, the spray thrown up by the great sea of misery which girdles our few little islands of happiness. Lena's home is one of those islands, and there her foundlings forget what neglect and desertion mean, and grow healthy and bright, or else pass peacefully to the happier Home above. There her dark eyes have lost all weird and melancholy lights and shades, and are bright with love, and watchful for homely household cares. There, too, her sweet voice is once more heard, in lullabies that have no terror in them, and gay songs in which the childish voices have learnt to join, as they cluster round her. She is a mother to them, but she always teaches them to call her "Sister."

Little Tim rests—as I said—under the shadow of our old church tower. Lena has put a cross over his grave, with the words, "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more." People think these appropriate; but no one knows why above them is carved the dove with the olive-branch.

VERA SINGLETON.

EVENSONG.

OH clear, far-deepening skies!
Full moon, and not a star;
Save, as the sunset dies,
Bright Hesperus afar.

Oh magic of the air,
Like breath of heaven divine:
Oh charm of all things fair—
Oh happy heart of mine!

The dim light dies away
From out the charmèd west:
The busy life of day,
Sinks suddenly to rest;

And in the deepening calm,
Far through the twilight clear;
Sweet as an angel's psalm,
Thy tender voice I hear.

Far is thy happy home,
Yet am I near to thee;
And like dear music come
Thy words of prayer for me.

Aye, through my lonely life,
Through all its toil and care;
In stillness or in strife,
I hear thy evening prayer.

A. M. H.

IN HALF AN HOUR.

"JUST wait for us a little while! We will come back in half an hour!" Norah and Bob had said, and they had gone off into the little wood, hand-in-hand, like two children.

So Missy was left quite alone, to move herself backwards and forwards in the swing, and feeling herself, to say truth, rather left out. Why had they wanted to go off by themselves? she wondered. It was so strange of Norah, when her brother had just telegraphed to say he was coming down that afternoon to see her. How odd, too, that they should want to get away from her! Missy was not accustomed to being neglected. Hitherto she had always been first with Bob, and first with Norah, but since Norah and Bob had become acquainted, things had assumed a very different aspect, and the intense friendship which had sprung up between these two threatened to extinguish Missy altogether.

Missy did not like it, but as yet she had no comprehension of its full significance, no due appreciation of the calamity which had befallen her. At present, she was only aware that Bob preferred Norah's company to hers, and that Norah—perfidious Norah!—evidently liked Bob's society better than that of her dearest friend. It was very disagreeable, and, to put an end to the unpleasant thought, Missy called up her favourite subject of meditation, and began to weave afresh the romantic web of fancy which encircled the person of the wondrous being of the future, who was on his way to woo and win her virgin heart.

She was very young—only seventeen—and the assertion of even those few years seemed belied by her childish appearance. But she was very pretty, and she made a charming picture as she sat in the swing, in her strawberry-coloured dress and large bonnet, with her deep, serious eyes fixed on the little gate into the wood, and her red lips half-smiling as some sweet imagination passed through her mind. So, at least, thought a young man who was coming noiselessly towards her along the dahlia-bordered grass-walk, and who did not fail to mark the beauty of her profile, and the grace of her movements as she stirred herself lazily to and fro by the help of her daintily-shod foot. Advancing quietly in front of her, he lifted his hat. She was not slow to perceive who he must be.

"You are Norah's brother—you are Mr. O'Hagan," she said, simply. "Norah has gone into the wood with Bob for half an hour. Will you wait for them?"

Mr. O'Hagan had no objection to wait. He threw himself down on a garden-seat close by, and sat looking at the girl, who continued her half-unconscious motion, with an expression on her face which

betrayed a degree of shyness. She felt, indeed, that she ought to speak, but eventually it was Mr. O'Hagan who took the initiative.

"You seem delightfully situated here," he said. "Have you lived in this place always?"

"Yes; it belongs to Bob, my brother," replied Missy, briefly.

"Then you are Missy, of whom I have often heard?"

"Yes, I am Missy. And you are Norah's eldest brother, the barrister, of whom *I* have often heard."

"Why have Norah and your brother gone away without you?" asked Mr. O'Hagan, abruptly.

"I do not know," returned Missy.

"But you must know," said Mr. O'Hagan, in a tone of gentle authority. "Norah is your guest, and it is not usual for young ladies to go about alone with their friends' brothers."

"Norah is doing nothing unusual," cried Missy, flushing angrily, for, though she was very unhappy, she did not choose that Mr. O'Hagan should find fault. "Bob is Norah's *own* friend, and Aunt Caroline sees no harm in anything they do. They are very fond of each other."

"So it would appear," said Mr. O'Hagan, drily. He was somewhat annoyed. He had received an ambiguous letter from his sister that morning, which had made him think it advisable he should try and find out what she was doing, and now he had come to try, and she had vanished. But she had left a substitute, and to this substitute, after a moment's pause, Mr. O'Hagan turned.

"You must be very glad," he said, "that your friend and your brother are such allies. Is he your only brother?"

"Yes," replied Missy, with a profound sigh. "Bob is my only brother, and Norah is my only friend. But I am not *very* glad they are such friends. They like to play chess, and that is a game that three cannot play; and they like to drive in the dog-cart, and only two can sit in front."

"And now they like to go alone into the wood?" suggested Mr. O'Hagan.

"Yes, it is a preserve, you know, and Bob thought it would disturb the pheasants if three people went through talking; but he said he and Norah would walk along quietly, and speak very softly."

"Oh!" said Mr. O'Hagan, with a lengthened intonation.

"Why do you say *Oh* like that?" cried Missy, pettishly. She felt glad that Bob was not like Norah's brother, who was so old—thirty, at the very least, he must be—and who asked such strange questions, and made such singular ejaculations.

"Miss Missy—May I call you Miss Missy?" asked Mr. O'Hagan gravely.

"Just as you like," she said, indifferently.

"Very well then," he proceeded. "Miss Missy, I want evidence upon a certain matter. The swing is the witness-box, and you are

in the swing; argal, you are the witness. Now, with nature looking so fair about you, with the sky so blue above you, the cool green woods waving to your right, and the gorgeous dahlias smiling to your left, you feel undoubtedly that you could not possibly speak an untruth; hence you are committed to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Now I commence."

Missy gazed at her interlocutor with wide and astonished eyes. She checked the restless vibrations of the swing, and pressed her feet firmly on the ground, while she encircled the ropes with her arms, clasping her hands before her. She was puzzled, but not displeased. A lovelier witness, the young man thought, he had never seen.

"Miss Missy," he began, "do you know what flirting is?"

"Yes," said Missy, promptly.

"Then define flirting."

"I did not say I could *define* it," said Missy, with a little appearance of pouting.

"Then you do *not* know what flirting is."

"Yes, I do," cried Missy. "Flirting is when two people seem to like each other very much, and to live only for each other, and then they part, and forget one another altogether."

"And their intercourse leaves no mark?"

"No, they have been only amused."

"But suppose they have been more than amused—suppose their association *has* left a mark?"

"Then they have been in earnest."

"And what is the result of being in earnest?"

"It is love," said Missy, in a low, sweet voice. She glanced downwards, and was completely unaware that Mr. O'Hagan's gaze was fixed upon her, and still less was she aware that his breast was swelling with an uncalled-for indignation on her account. His was an imaginative nature, prone to leap to superlative possibilities, and something in Missy's youthfulness, beauty and naïveté, had made him jump to a possibility of the most exaggerated evil. At this moment he found himself speculating about some man who might some day be only amused with this innocent creature, while she, perchance, might be in earnest. "I would horsewhip such a fellow within an inch of his life," he said, wrathfully, in his heart. Then he suddenly remembered that, as far as he knew, there was no such man, and he smiled contemptuously at his own fantastic conceit. Moreover the present was all his own.

"What is love, Miss Missy?" he asked, abruptly.

"Love is when the beautiful youth comes," she said, still looking away.

"And who is the beautiful youth?" he inquired. He felt curious to know whether a young man of six or seven-and-twenty, not bad looking—Oh, by no means bad-looking—and not altogether stupid, certainly with some prospects of professional success, might be

looked upon as a beautiful youth. Perhaps a tinge of unsuspected jealousy unwittingly heightened his curiosity.

A sort of glow diffused itself over Missy's face; her vision seemed to be lost in the dim recesses of the little chase; her whole manner seemed to bespeak a state of ecstatic feeling.

"The beautiful youth," she said slowly and pensively, "is all glorious to behold, like the early sun in summer, or like the splendour of the apple-orchards when the fruit is ripe. He is a peerless knight clothed with dignity, and virtue, and truth, and a burning fire goes out of his heart, and consumes all iniquity as he passes by. He goes through the world like Sigurd, redressing every wrong, and the hearts of the people trust in him, and when he speaks, or even when he comes near, men and women are happier and better, and little children are gladder and holier. His locks are bright, as if the sun had kissed them, and his eyes are calm and pure, as if the stars sojourned within them. His hands are mighty, like the resistless north wind, and his feet are rapid, like the rushing of many rivers, and his heart is deep—deep like the unfathomed sea."

"And ——?" uttered the young man, breathlessly. He was amazed at Missy's gush of poetic fervour, and he longed for her to continue. He knew well that in speech was danger. A word might break the spell—but a breath—a breath might compass his desire. "If I hung for it, I would kill the fellow who played her false!" he thought.

"And one day," Missy proceeded, dreamily, "one day he will come to find me. Perhaps he will come in the vernal sunshine, and thrushes and blackbirds will carol as he draws nigh, and pale shy primroses, and the fragrant cowslips, and the nodding violets, will spring around his feet as he moves, and great joy will be in his soul. Or perhaps he will come through the fields when the corn is golden, and clusters of nuts will garland his head, and rich purple plums will fill his hands, and poppies will spread a regal carpet for his feet, and gladness will be in his mien. Or perhaps he will come at dewy eve rowing over the tranquil mere, and pearls will drip from his oars, and lily-buds will follow in his wake, and he will come to shore where the forget-me-nots are bluest, and a tender peace will be upon him. And he will recognise me, and know that his destiny has arrived, and he will rejoice—rejoice. And we two shall link our hands together, and a thrill of sympathy will unite us for ever, and time will be lost in the eternity of our bliss."

She ceased, and her chin drooped, till it rested on her folded hands. He remained silent; he was disappointed. He felt it was utterly prosaic to be a barrister—to be business-like and busy—to have briefs and clients—to be astute and practical. He could never attain the perfections of the beautiful youth. No sun would ever condescend to kiss his curly hair; no star would ever vouchsafe to abide in his merry eyes; no flowers would ever be induced to spring

up round his trim and well-made boots. He must go on in the ordinary way, and look for no poetic termination to his career. He was hopelessly common-place—merely a barrister; there was nothing Sigurdlike about him. "But I will strangle that fellow!" he exclaimed, vindictively. He hardly knew whether he was referring to the man who, in a possible future, might be amused at Missy's expense, or to the beautiful youth: he knew not at all that he had spoken aloud.

"What fellow? Who are you talking of?" exclaimed Missy, starting. "Are you speaking of the beautiful youth? Have I been talking of him all this time?" she cried, in an agony. "Oh! what have I done? What shall I do? I have told you my secret, and I shall never, never be happy again. Why did you draw me on to talk and tell you all about him? I never meant to tell you anything, and now you have led me on to convict myself. Aunt Caroline says barristers always make people convict themselves, and you are a barrister. You are a bad man!"

She had got out of the swing when first she began to speak; now she walked slowly away between the rows of dahlias. When she had gone half-way, however, she turned back, and Mr. O'Hagan went to meet her.

"You will please to come indoors," she said coldly. "If Aunt Caroline happened to be out when you arrived, I dare say she has returned now."

She seemed suddenly transformed from an elfin child into a dignified woman. In days that came after—and that came without Mr. O'Hagan being under the necessity of laying violent hands upon any other man—he recollected this little scene—the outburst of childish passion, and the instinctive womanly control which ensued—and loved to dwell upon it. He felt now as if a jury had found him guilty, but he resolved to try and say one word in his own defence.

"Miss Missy," he began, contritely, "I only wanted to talk to you about Norah and your brother, I never meant to vex you."

"I do not care to talk to you about people, Mr. O'Hagan," said Missy, severely. "If you like, we can talk about the Irish Question, or the Egyptian War, or "Iolanthe," but I do not wish to talk about persons."

"But I must learn something about my sister," said Mr. O'Hagan.

"What about her?" asked Missy, relenting a little.

"I want to know whether she and your brother are in earnest, or if they are only amused."

"I do not know. You had better ask Norah and my brother themselves. I do not desire to commit myself any further," said Missy, grandly.

"Miss Missy," said Mr. O'Hagan, humbly, and altering his line of action, "I plead guilty to your charge. I have done a mean thing, and all I can venture to say for myself is, that your conversation so

enchanted me, that I could not bear to interrupt you. Is that any extenuation in your eyes?"

She did not answer; her lips were yet tremulous, and her eyes moist, with recent agitation, but the hardness had gone out of her face. Noting this, Mr. O'Hagan pushed his advantage.

"I am covered with shame at the thought of my baseness," he went on. "But almost before I realised that you were reposing a confidence in me, the confidence was already mine. Miss Missy, I beg your pardon a thousand times. I cannot undo what is done, but perhaps it may mitigate your distress to be assured that your secret is absolutely safe with me. I shall never reveal it to a human being."

"You are very kind," she said, sorrowfully. "But it will never be the same to me again. Nobody knew—not Bob, nor Norah. It was my one fair secret, and the thought of it consoled me whenever I was sad, or alone. It was my rosy dream, which stood ever, like a tender angel, by my side, and it lulled me to sleep in the night, and brought me joy in the morning; and now ——"

"And now," said Mr. O'Hagan, gently, "though someone else knows your secret, it is someone who honours it, and would fain be like your ideal. I am not such a very bad man, Miss Missy. Don't you remember, Portia was a barrister, and she redressed a great wrong? We barristers do try to act justly, I assure you. Won't you think kindly of me, when your mind is occupied with your sweet secret?" he added, imploringly. "I have a dream too, and an unspoken secret, and when they are present with me, I shall think of you—perpetually."

"You have a dream? What is your dream like, I wonder!" said Missy, wistfully.

"My dream!" he answered. "It is of the most beautiful damsel who walks this earth: she is sweeter than Juliet, and nobler than Cordelia, more winning than Rosalind, more charming than Beatrice."

"She must be impossible," interrupted Missy, smiling, and amused in spite of herself. "*The inexpressive She*, truly!"

Mr. O'Hagan opened his lips to speak, and then checked himself. But he felt convinced that his *inexpressive She* was a far likelier possibility than Missy's beautiful youth. Nay, did she not stand before him, and was he not prepared to slay fifty men who might dare a treachery to her?

"Some day I will tell you all about her," he said, "and you shall say whether my secret be fair, and my dream bright. It shall stand or fall by your verdict. And now that I have discovered my hidden longing, will you forgive me?"

"Yes, indeed," she said, readily. She was not resentful. But she did not quite understand Mr. O'Hagan. She knew no longing with respect to the beautiful youth; she was satisfied he would come, and

she was content to wait. But this damsel, of whom Mr. O'Hagan spoke, was an evident absurdity, and perhaps this unnecessary longing was a natural sequence to an absurdity. Men were often ridiculous outside their offices and studies; she had heard Aunt Caroline say so. However it was not unpleasant to feel that this man was less wise than herself. Besides, poor fellow! he would never find his damsel, and she ought to be sorry for him.

They were still standing at the top of the grass-walk, and now Missy turned round.

"There are Norah and Bob coming out of the wood," she said. "See how happy they look! Bob looks taller, or older, or prouder—I don't know what—but he seems different to me. What can it be, Mr. O'Hagan? And Norah seems younger and prettier! And there is something glistening on her finger—it looks like a jewelled ring—but she had no ring on this morning! And they are talking so joyously together that they do not see us! They look as if a fairy had given them some shining treasure. What is it, Mr. O'Hagan? It is like a Michaelmas afternoon's dream."

"Miss Missy," said Mr. O'Hagan, oracularly, "I think Norah has met the beautiful youth, and I think Bob has realised his rosy dream, and unveiled his fair secret."

"Then is everyone alike?" murmured Missy, regretfully. "Has everyone a fair secret and a rosy dream?"

"Everyone, I hope—nearly everyone, I believe," said Mr. O'Hagan. "Let us go and meet them. They have not been only amused, they have been in earnest."

And the prim dahlias did not turn aside, but smiled proudly, as the two who had played their little drama amongst them, met those other two who had been unfolding sweet secrets in the wood for half an hour.

PLYMOUTH HOE.

Oh, softly by the banks of Dart
The summer breezes blow;
And gaily dancing past the Start
The foam-topped ripples go—
And nowhere upon English ground
Such oaks and chestnuts grow,
As where, right over Plymouth Sound,
Stands out fair Plymouth Hoe!

The *Western Maid* was homeward bound,
Her crew were Devon men:
"Crowd on all sail to make the Sound,
We're almost home again!"
('Twas thus I heard the captain say)
"With the west wind on our lee,
To-night we'll lie in Plymouth Bay
As snug as snug can be!"

It was the autumn equinox
That drove up Channel smart;
(There runs a cruel reef of rocks
From Lizard Point to Start
"God's sake," the older seamen said,
"Furl sail till morning light,
'Twere mad to take the *Western Maid*
Across the rocks to-night!"

A creeping mist came slowly up
And hid the land a-head;
"In Plymouth Bay I'm bound to sup,"
The captain laughing said—
Then came a shuddering, blinding shock,
None spoke, for all could feel,
The *Western Maid* was on the rock
And its teeth were in her keel!

Dear Lord! it is an awful thing
To see a ship go down—
With cries for help and hands that cling,
To see brave comrades drown.
She just reeled back, our *Western Maid*,
One wild bound in the air,
"May God forgive,"—the captain said,
And then—she was not there.

(Oh, can you tell a fairer sight,
That any land may show,
Than the soft, blue night, when light by light,
Steals out above, below?
The shipping lights a-swinging bright,
And the harbour all a-glow,
And the lights of the town as the dark creeps down
That shine on Plymouth Hoe!)

I think it was a dream I had
(I knew not night from day):
Once more I was a little lad
And fished in Cawsand Bay—
And old rough scenes of sailor life
Went by me, strange and fleet,
And then, I met and kissed my wife
At home in Plymouth street!

The *Western Maid* outside the Sound,
Was lost six years ago:
Why I was saved when better drowned,
I'm sure I do not know—
Her crew of ten, all Devon men,
Washed in at morning flow:
For tho' we roam, we all come home,
At last to Plymouth Hoe!

G. B. Stuart.

M. ELLEN STAPLES.

R. AND E. TAYLOR.

WINIFRED POWER.

CHAPTER X.

SIR JOHN.

THE church bells of the little village of Elmsleigh, sheltered in its quiet Surrey nook, were calling people to service on Sunday morning. Mrs. Chandos-Fane, while dressing herself with extraordinary care, cast glances of unusual scrutiny at her daughter's own attire. She suggested various youthful and airy additions, which the girl would not make.

"Never mind, mother," said Winifred good-humouredly. "It really does not matter how I look when you are by. You are elegant enough and pretty enough for both of us."

"I hope I always look like a lady, my love," said Mrs. Fane, contemplating herself virtuously in the glass. Nobody ever accused me of vanity, even when I was your age, although *I* did not affect to be indifferent to my appearance. But I confess I should like Sir John not to feel ashamed of his connections."

"I dare say poor old Sir John will hardly look at us, mamma."

Mrs. Chandos-Fane bridled. "*Old!* He is not old, my love. But since any allusion to your benefactor displeases you—yes, I call him so—I will not make it. I have no doubt Mark will suit you better."

With this, Mrs. Fane swam out of the room and the house, and Winifred silently followed.

On reaching the church and sitting down, she guessed by the frequent turns of her mother's head in what direction she was to look for the Hatherley party. But the service was on the very point of beginning before they appeared, and then Sir John was not with them. Only Mrs. Hatherley and her daughters, with Mark, Sir John's son. Winifred, woman-like, looked at the latter first. He was a grave, handsome young man, who evidently did not wear his heart upon his sleeve, but looked, nevertheless, as though he had heart and brains

too. He recognised Mrs. Chandos-Fane, and raised his eyes quickly towards Winifred. For a moment their glances met, seriously, quietly, without a trace of consciousness. Then Mark turned his head away, and Winifred transferred her observation to the ladies. The mother, William Hatherley's widow, was an octoroon born in Jamaica, and looked like it. She was heavily dressed, even on this bright September morning, and had a trick of drawing her shoulders forward and shivering slightly, presumably under a visitation of draughts that afflicted nobody else. Between these trembling movements, her small, wizened face, and her bright, glancing eyes, she reminded one of a captive marmoset.

Her daughters were two rather pretty little things, extremely alike, and very daintily attired. Winifred wondered whether it was only the proximity of Mark's massive brow that made their delicate faces look so mindless. They glanced at her with ill-concealed curiosity, and took evident stock of her costume from her bonnet to her boots.

At the church-door the whole party met, Mrs. Chandos-Fane going forward with a marked cordiality. The girls responded to it with some shrinking, Mark with a calm politeness, and Mrs. Hatherley—not at all.

"My daughter: she has been dying to make your dear children's acquaintance," said Mrs. Fane to her. Winifred longed to contradict her flatly, but feeling that to be impossible, she gave her hand to them with grace.

"You have just arrived?" said one of them to her, Dorothy, regarding her delicate gloves.

"Yes, just—haven't you?" echoed the other, Florence, scrutinizing the severity of her dress.

"I trust we shall have the pleasure of seeing you often at The Limes," said Mark, who had been looking at Winifred with a composed directness that half-amused and half-provoked her. She conceived of him that he was a young man who always did his duty, and invited her and her mother now as a part of it.

"We will call on Sir John this afternoon," said Mrs. Fane. Whereupon Mark shook hands, raised his hat, and said, "Good-bye, then, until later;" his cousins nodded condescendingly, and Mrs. Hatherley murmured something that was presumably a farewell.

"A more ill-mannered quartette I never wish to see," exclaimed Mrs. Fane, with an acrid vigour of denunciation strikingly in contrast with her usual suavity.

"Mark was polite and pleasant enough," answered Winifred.

Sir John Hatherley was the great man of this small neighbourhood. People regarded him with awe, and talked of his good fortune with almost superstitious veneration. Originally he had been a brewer: but no ordinary one. For the brewery was an old-established, almost aristocratic affair: and he had been left by his father sole possessor of it, and a rich man besides. In a short time he sold the business

and also his handsome house near Marleyford, and bought this place, "The Limes," at Elmsleigh. Then he engaged in railway speculations to a large degree; gained money upon money, applause, and the honour of knighthood. "He is like a king," said the admiring world; "everything he touches turns to gold." But he had his peculiarities.

Mrs. Fane and Winifred went to The Limes through the afternoon sunshine. Dolly met them in the hall.

"Hush! hush!" cried she.

"Hush!" added Flossie, coming forward.

"What is the matter?" inquired Winifred, very much astonished.

"You are passing the library," whispered Dolly. "Uncle John is resting. His heart, you know," she explained as she led the way to the drawing-room.

Winifred then remembered that Sir John suffered from disease of the heart and was supposed to be living in a critical state.

On entering the room they found Mrs. Hatherley smothered in shawls in the depths of an arm-chair. She rose languidly, extended a tiny, listless hand and got as far as the first word of "How do you do," after which she sank back again.

"And your cousin Mark?" said Mrs. Fane, with sweet inquiry.

"He is out," answered Dolly.

"Gone to town, I think," said her sister.

A faint shadow of annoyance crossed Mrs. Fane's pretty face, but she said with undiminished feeling, "And dear Sir John is unwell?"

"His heart, you know," began the sisters together, when suddenly Mrs. Hatherley interrupted them.

"He eat too much pheasant-salmi yesterday," she remarked in a drawling monotone. At this unexpected observation Winifred absolutely started and glanced at the speaker with a new curiosity. But the pale little face above the bundle of shawls was totally impassive. Mrs. Fane looked unmistakably indignant at the remark, and said that invalids were greatly to be pitied.

"Dear Uncle Hatherley suffers terribly. And, as he always tells us, any agitation might kill him," said the elder of the sisters.

"The *least* agitation," repeated Florence. And both spoke in such evident good faith that Winifred smiled on them with her bright sympathy, saying kindly: "I dare say he owes much of his ease to your nursing."

"Who would not willingly nurse such a sufferer!" chimed in Mrs. Fane. "I am sure I would sit up night after night: although, with my anxious temperament, I am aware that I should pay dearly for it."

At this amiable outburst it must be confessed that Winifred rather stared. Mrs. Fane had had plenty of opportunities of nursing her brother Walter, but she had certainly never availed herself of them.

"And are you very fond of nursing also?" suddenly said Mrs. Hatherley to Winifred, lifting her head from her wraps.

"Mr. Russell, as you probably know, has been a helpless invalid for years," answered Winifred gravely.

"And I will say of my darling child that she is always most devoted to him. She has but one fault—if fault it can be called—that of being unwilling to let anyone, even *me*, share her task." Mrs. Chandos-Fane turned a glance of enchanting maternal sweetness on her exasperated daughter, but the expression suddenly changed on meeting Mrs. Hatherley's brilliant, monkey-like eyes. What did the woman mean by her impudent stare? she mentally asked—and Mrs. Fane repaid it with interest, her blue eyes meeting the black ones intrepidly: but she did not succeed in staring Mrs. Hatherley down.

At this moment the door opened to admit a tall, stately, and still very handsome man. With his black velvet dressing-gown, his black velvet cap, and flowing white beard, Sir John Hatherley, for he it was, might have sat for a picture of Prospero.

Winifred rose; Mrs. Fane hurried forward; Dolly rushed for a footstool; Flossie to shut the window. Mrs. Hatherley alone remained motionless and unmoved.

With a wave of his hand in acknowledgment to his nieces, a bend of his head in greeting to Mrs. Chandos-Fane, the master of The Limes walked straight up to our heroine.

"And who is this?" he asked in slow, melodious tones, looking down upon her with his magician-like air.

"My daughter, dear Sir John."

"Mater pulchra, filia pulchrior." This compliment, accompanied by a stately bow, would probably have afforded Mrs. Fane but a moderate amount of gratification had she understood it. As it was, she blushed with enchanting sweetness; while Winifred, standing there with her hand clasped in Sir John's long and wax-like fingers, was regarding him with steady eyes of the frankest astonishment. She was completely taken aback by his appearance and manner, she had expected a genial benevolence, a bluff kind of genuine cordiality, but nothing like this majesty, or this matchless "get up in velvet." Sooth to say, she was but slightly impressed. Possessing the touchstone of a royal sincerity, she did not take long to detect the dross of a nature that was not sincere. And with the sudden rush of an overpowering conviction, she was fain, albeit reluctantly, to confess to herself that she considered Sir John Hatherley was no better than Mrs. Russell.

Quite unconscious of the impression he had produced, the benefactor of so many people—and that he was—responded to the general inquiries concerning his health with urbane resignation.

Probably he admired Winifred, for he addressed his conversation principally to her. He asked her, she noted, next to nothing about the Russells, but a great deal about herself. With a suave, fatherly manner he talked to her of her art, her success, and of art in general. She did not think he knew much about it, but listened respectfully. Everybody else listened also, and Winifred was quick to see that Sir

John liked a hushed circle of auditors. Even when Mark came in, as he did presently, he took a seat in the background and remained silently attentive. It was quite like a lecture: and the resemblance was further increased by Mrs. Hatherley's going to sleep and Mrs. Fane's smothering a yawn or two, the girls meanwhile sitting both upright, with their eyes very wide open indeed.

Sir John was not long in getting off art to his bibliomania—that mysterious quality which the neighbourhood adored in him without comprehending it.

Mrs. Fane, eagerly professing interest in Elzevirs and Aldines, he asked her rather sharply if she understood them: and on finding she did not, graciously offered to exhibit his collection. Upon this, the whole party adjourned to the library, even Mrs. Hatherley gathering together her shawls and shuffling tardily after the rest.

One after the other, the treasures were produced. A "Theocritus," printed by Zacharias Calliergi; a Romaunt de la Rose, bound in morocco and stamped with the bees of De Thou; an Elzevir "Patissier Français" (worth a fantastic price); an original quarto of "Macbeth;" some plays in the rose-coloured bindings of the graceless Du Barry; a "Manon Lescant" illustrated by Boucher.

"For this," said Sir John, unlocking a glass-case and producing an illuminated psalter written in gold on a purple ground, "for this I paid £800."

There was a universal exclamation. Even Mrs. Hatherley craned her neck towards the object with an air of unusual interest.

"It is very old," continued its possessor, "as you may see, or might if you understood, by the clearness of the writing and the grotesqueness of the figures."

"I have heard that it is difficult to tell whether these psalters are genuine or not," said Winifred. "What are the signs?"

A certain peevishness, if any term so flippant were admissible in regard to him, was visible in Sir John at this question. Contrary to the wont of most collectors, he did not seem to care to exhibit his erudition.

"The signs? They have to do with the catchwords. You would be a long while understanding them, my dear young lady," he added while locking up and restoring the case.

"Where is your illustrated "Gerusalemme Liberata?" asked Mark. "I want to show it to Miss Power. As an artist, she will appreciate it more than any of us."

"Why, Mark, I am sure I think it beautiful," exclaimed Dolly, very naively aggrieved.

"Where is it, sir?" persisted grave Mark, with a slight glance at his young cousin.

"I have sent it to the binder."

"To the binder?" echoed the young man in surprise. "The binding was perfect, and of the early eighteenth century, I believe."

"It was out of repair," responded Sir John, still more briefly than before. Then lying back in his chair, he gently closed his eyes, raised his beard to a picturesque angle, and put his white hand feebly to his heart.

"Oh, he is ill!" cried Florence, and flew to his side.

"Eau-de-Cologne," exclaimed Dolly, and vanished in search of it.

Mark, with an air of concern which yet had something perplexed about it, quietly opened a window and then approached the invalid. He knew that these attacks might mean mischief.

Sir John waved his disengaged hand slightly. "No fuss, I beg," he murmured. "The paroxysm is not severe; it will pass."

Apparently in a few moments it did pass, for Sir John's fingers quitted his heart, and he motioned to them to take seats. Which they did.

And although he still sat with closed eyes, his family's feelings were sufficiently relieved to enable them to converse, in subdued tones, on indifferent subjects.

Mrs. Fane condescended to talk to Dolly and Florence, in this way leaving Winifred practically tête-à-tête with Mark. The girl secretly a little attracted by his grave but gentle manner, began describing in a very animated and charming way, a certain eccentric bibliophile whom she had known in Paris. This old man had talked to her by the hour on his beloved subject, enlarging on his frequent visits to the Quais, his baffled longings, his deluded hopes, his rare trouvailles of precious books which had escaped the lynx eyes of dealers. He told her how he had journeyed to Toulouse to see the collection of Count M'Carthy, and to Padua, there silently to adore a "Catullus" on vellum. He abounded in anecdotes of book collectors, past and present, from Bussy-Rabutin to Charles Nodier, and revelled in recounting how many tens of pounds, more or less, depended upon an infinitesimal difference in the margins of an Elzevir.

"What a delightful old monomaniac!" said Mark, looking with pleased interest at his companion's sparkling face. "My father has not nearly so much enthusiasm. That is, I suppose he has it, but he does not show it." As he pronounced these words, it did not escape his hearer's quick observation that there was a subtle change in his voice, and a curious unwilling doubt in the glance that he directed towards the venerable head in the velvet cap.

"Has Sir John a catalogue of his books?" Winifred presently asked, her eyes ranging along the well-filled shelves.

"No, indeed. It is a great want. He is always saying he must invite some capable person down to make one."

"Then I know the very person for him," exclaimed Winifred impulsively. "Poor Dick Dallas."

"And who is Dick Dallas?" asked Mark. "And why is he 'poor?

"Because he is so unfortunate," said Winifred: and she poured forth the story of Richard's wrongs.

"I do not think he would be at all the proper person for my father to employ," observed Mark when she had finished.

"Why not?"

"A man who has been accused of culpable negligence, to call it by no harsher term ——"

"But I tell you he is innocent," flashed out Winifred.

"So you say, Miss Power, and you have possibly good personal grounds for believing it. But the rest of the world would unfortunately require proof," continued Mark, with a touch of indulgent, smiling irony.

"Surely it is tea-time," interrupted Sir John, rising. "I shall be glad of a cup. Did I hear you say something, Miss Power, about a person capable of making a catalogue of my books?" he inquired, as they went into the drawing-room.

Enchanted at the question, Winifred a second time recounted her tale.

"Try to persuade her that there are a few unfortunate people in the world who are not worth helping," said Mark, with a smile, to his father.

But Sir John, on the contrary, looked tender and took Winifred's hand in his. "Your enthusiasm does you honour, my child. Even supposing the young man to be guilty, he should be given a second chance for his own sake. You can write to Mr. Dallas, if you like," he resumed after a pause of thought: "tell him what the work would be, and ask him to come here. He shall have his board and lodging until it is completed."

"And—and a salary?" faltered Winifred. She was almost speechless with joy and gratitude, but a vivid vision of the sorely-pinched Dallas household urged her to the question.

"Bless me, no!" exclaimed Sir John, with unusual briskness. "We have imperative duties towards society, my dear young lady. One of these duties is the observance of discipline towards the erring. Until your friend has reconquered his position, he should be encouraged but not indulged."

Slightly crestfallen but still grateful, the girl expressed her thanks; she felt too exultant to mind even Mark's answering glance to her mother's low-toned remark. "My dear daughter is almost Quixotically soft-hearted. Sometimes even I venture humbly to remonstrate with her."

Later in the evening, when the guests were gone, and Sir John was again alone in his library, he was disturbed by the entrance of Mrs. Hatherley. He looked up at her quickly and not amiably, while she paused beside his chair. Evidently she had something to say, in the saying of which he would not help her.

"John," she began at last, tremulously, "you are kind to so many; so kind. Have you no compassion for *him?*"

"Again, Laura! How many more times must I beg of you not to speak to me on that subject?"

"But he is starving," whispered Mrs. Hatherley, and clasped her hands imploringly.

"He deserves to starve," retorted Sir John. "I tell you, for the fiftieth time, that I will not give you a penny for him. I do not wish to appear to cast what I do for you in your teeth, Laura, but you might, I think, sometimes count up the number of years you have been here, and what I have done for you and your daughters. How can you expect me to supply the extravagance of a spendthrift and a —— an inebriate?"

"He is your brother's son," urged the mother, trembling with agitation.

"My *disinherited* brother's son," was the cruel answer.

Could that be quiet Mrs. Hatherley who, raising her brown, slender head from among her shawls, like a snake emerging from the grass, shot out at her benefactor a glance so full of venom?

"Why have you supported us all these years?" she asked.

Sir John stared. "I like that question, Laura! Out of kindness, of course."

"Not because Mary bid you?"

"Mary! Now, understand me, Laura. I will submit to neither insolence nor insinuation. As long as you behave becomingly, the shelter of The Limes is yours; but it would cost me nothing to part from you to-morrow. How much it would cost you and your two empty-headed girls is another question."

Mrs. Hatherley cowered as beneath an icy blast. To her poltroon creole soul, the bare idea of poverty and exertion was like death. She turned and crept away, humbled, silenced—but unforgiving.

Sir John followed her with his eyes as she left, his attitude very rigid the while, his expression very hard. There was so little of the gentle student or the benevolent invalid in him at that moment that Winifred, had she seen him, would have been much strengthened in her distrust of the bland and gracious master of The Limes.

CHAPTER XI.

GERTRUDE DALLAS.

Mrs. Chandos-Fane cultivated Sir John Hatherley's good will with an industry that was in no wise lessened by his obvious insensibility to her charms. In point of fact, she was thinking that she should like to be Lady Hatherley, and that perseverance might eventually win the day. Perhaps she also thought that if she failed with the father, there was no reason why Winifred should fail with the son. Mark, indeed, seemed much the more likely prize. He evidently admired Winifred, and as evidently liked her. The great obstacle

arose from the girl herself. She was so absolutely frank and uncompromising; so devoid of coquetry; so bent upon convincing rather than conciliating, that her mother was secretly in despair.

For the rest, she had her hands full: for if Sir John would not fall a captive to her bow and spear, there was another who would, and did. And that was Mr. Burton, the Rector.

He was a rich and childless widower, and one of those slow, heavy, honest men who think that no man can be expected to comprehend women. Their airs and graces, their nerves and fancies were to him just as recondite as their articles of costume. *They* recognised the wrong side of a mantle from the right, and pronounced the front of a bonnet to be its apparent back. It was to be presumed consequently that they knew also what they meant when weeping or blushing unaccountably, or saying one thing while thinking another. All a man had to do was to take things quietly as long as he was provided with his dinner. These being his ideas, it may be imagined that he was wax in the hands of a charming woman like Mrs. Fane. It was a perfect comedy to watch his face when she was talking to him, pouring out, with her enchanting smiles and various waves and nods of her pretty head, the clap-trap second-hand ideas in which she delighted. She talked to him of Baudelaire (of whom, fortunately, he had never heard); of early Italian art; of stained-glass windows and the degeneration of modern morals. Now he thought he had understood her, now he was afraid he hadn't; now he had the dawn of a suspicion that if he did, he would not approve of her. But as she invariably wound up with some sentiment of extreme propriety, he would smile upon her, reassured that her nimble intelligence had outstripped his stolid one.

Still, the Rector of Elmsleigh could not approach Sir John Hatherley in a worldly point of view, and Mrs. Fane spent many an evening in the drawing-room at The Limes; walking thither after dinner. Sir John, by the light of a shaded lamp, sometimes dropped majestically to sleep over some huge folio while talking with her; Dolly and Florence played backgammon; and Mrs. Hatherley kept a stealthy and not too well-contented watch upon Winifred and Mark.

They had drifted into the habit of talking almost exclusively to one another. Mark, attracted by her frank friendliness, spoke more freely to her than to most people. She learnt with surprise that while Sir John was still supposed to have a share in business operations of some magnitude, Mark was entirely excluded from all knowledge of them. Unable to remain idle, he had invested the little fortune inherited from his mother in certain mines, and occasionally made journeys to the North in consequence. With her quick perception, Winifred divined that Mark felt the distance at which his father kept him. There was indeed a slight constraint between the younger and the elder man. Mark, Winifred guessed, would have loved his father could he have fully understood him; and he was studiously respectful

and attentive to him always. But Sir John, while indulgent to his son in all respects but one, treated him with indifference. The one point on which he was not indulgent was money. Winifred was fain to confess that his generosity towards his relatives must repose on other (and, of course, higher) grounds than mere lavishness.

Indeed, for the master of such a house, and the reputed owner of such wealth, Sir John was careful to the verge of avarice. Mark was reduced to live strictly on his own income, and was too proud, as well as too experienced, ever to ask for more. Every art and subterfuge had to be resorted to by Mrs. Hatherley and her daughters before they could obtain money for their personal wants; and of late it had even become a kind of joke among the tradespeople that Sir John would never pay a bill until the last possible moment. Many a man besides Sir John has become miserly from immense wealth.

"He is beginning to get a little cranky," people said, with an indulgent smile; although, considering his heart-disease, he looked wonderfully handsome and vigorous.

Richard Dallas had accepted Sir John's offer with great promptitude, and a week or two later presented himself at The Limes. Winifred noticed with some pain that adversity had not improved him. He had grown cold and cynical, and without looking at all shabby as to coats, bore about him the signs of recent ill-fortune and privation. But he set to work at the catalogue with steadiness and intelligence, and Sir John was much pleased with him. Winifred was delighted: it was giving Richard the chance he needed.

So the days passed pleasantly. Richard hard at work by day, joining the drawing-room circle in the evening; and sometimes walking out with the two young girls, generally by the side of Dolly.

"I hope they are not falling in love with one another," thought Winifred. "Sir John would not like that."

When the catalogue was nearing completion, Sir John began to wonder how he should employ him next.

"I think I must send him to the Hague to purchase several very rare editions which I hear will shortly be for sale there," he said one evening when Richard was not present. "It is a question of spending some thousands, and, therefore I must have an agent of intelligence as well as honesty on whom I can rely."

"Mr. Dallas is certainly intelligent," murmured Mrs. Fane in a tone which implied that there was more doubt about the honesty. Winifred flushed; and Mark, noting it, said chivalrously, "My father seems to me to have made an excellent choice in employing him."

"I flatter myself I understand character," resumed Sir John. "The young man tells me he has a sister who is at present in London seeking employment. She has been teaching in a school at Turin."

Turin? Then it was Gertrude! Winifred and her mother exchanged glances.

"She would be willing, he thinks, to enter any family for nothing at present. I am thinking of engaging her to teach the girls French. They are still deplorably ignorant of the language—as I found when we were at Boulogne."

The faces of the sisters fell considerably at this announcement. Winifred received it in silence; Mrs. Fane with an ironical smile. Gertrude! But they said nothing.

The next afternoon when Winifred was busy painting in her studio, and her mother, seated at a little distance, was alternately pointing out faults in the picture and perusing a novel of De Goncourt, Richard Dallas arrived to pay a visit. Winifred received him warmly, as usual, but was quick to notice that he seemed ill at ease.

After a little desultory conversation, he said abruptly, "Do you know that Gertrude is in London?"

"So Sir John said," answered Winifred, gently.

"He is kind enough to wish her to be governess to his nieces. Winifred—Mrs. Fane, you will do nothing to prevent it?"

He spoke entreatingly, with an earnestness and a feeling unusual to him. Touched, our impetuous Winifred had almost opened her lips to give the required assurance, when Mrs. Fane spoke drily.

"The responsibility of recommending your sister as a governess is yours, Mr. Dallas; what right have we to interfere?"

Richard turned red. He was in the uncomfortable position of wishing them to be silent on the subject of Gertrude's escapade in Paris; and desirous at the same time not to seem to attach much importance to the escapade itself. A perfectly scrupulous man might have hesitated, under the circumstances, before introducing his sister at The Limes. But perhaps Richard could not afford to be very scrupulous, and Gertrude's position touched and troubled him.

"She is all alone in London," he said, pleadingly.

"Why did she leave Turin?" inquired Mrs. Fane.

"She did not like the climate."

Mrs. Fane pursed up her lips: most climates, in her opinion, would disagree with Miss Dallas.

Winifred meanwhile had been reflecting. After all, she and her mother knew nothing positive against Gertrude, for the suggestion thrown out by Hortense had never, so far as they were aware, been verified. Suspicions they might have, but suspicions were no ground for action. Moreover, all her warm young heart went out to the friend of her youth, and turning towards her mother she said: "We must let her come."

"You always do as you like, my love. And you know that I never say anything," replied Mrs. Fane.

"You may depend upon our silence," said Winifred to Richard. "When will Gerty come?"

"Sir John has mentioned next week." And with a few words of gratitude, Richard went.

Mrs. Fane went on reading for a little space in silence. "When is Mark to be back?" she suddenly asked.

"Not for a fortnight, mamma." Winifred was extremely surprised and angry with herself to feel how the unexpected question had brought a rush of blood to her face. She hoped her mother did not see it, and continued her painting in an agony of puzzled embarrassment. Mark had started for Scotland that morning on his usual business, and Winifred was missing him much more than she would have owned to herself.

"Then when he returns, Miss Dallas will already be installed at The Limes," after another pause remarked Mrs. Fane.

"Well?" said Winifred.

"I daresay he will admire her very much."

Winifred mixed her colours with great accuracy; changed one brush for another; and began to work on another part of her picture before she replied. And then it was with an appeal.

"You will be kind to Gertrude, mother, will you not?"

"I am not aware, my love, that I am ever deliberately unkind to anybody. I may be mistaken, of course, but I have never been accused of it, and I have had many tried and valuable friends: although perhaps *you* would not have cared for them, darling."

"I did not mean to offend you," said the girl, humbly. "But I am anxious, *very* anxious," (with strong emphasis) "that Gertrude should have a fair chance at The Limes."

"I shall not interfere with her; and you may be as Quixotic as you please. That's all, Winifred."

So matters were arranged by Sir John with Miss Dallas, and she came to Elmsleigh to enter upon her engagement. With a shrinking which she did not care to analyse, Winifred allowed one clear day to elapse after her arrival before she went to see her.

She found her already installed in the schoolroom, with Dolly and Florence. Condemned to study again after their long period of liberty, they were both looking very doleful indeed.

Winifred entered with a beating heart, but was frozen on the very threshold by the coolness with which Gertrude rose to receive her.

"I will take you into the conservatory for a little chat when I have set my pupils their tasks," she said, composedly.

Winifred's sense of humour was greatly roused by the sight of the poor pupils. They had been vanquished, but a certain sulkiness betrayed their inward rebellion. When they presently brought their copybooks for correction, Gertrude seated—a picture of elegance and beauty in a luxurious arm-chair—took occasion to harangue them on the advantages of self-help, and to inform them that if they wished to learn anything thoroughly they must learn it unaided.

"My system is that you should do all that is possible without any assistance from me. Naturally you will make mistakes, but these mistakes, in course of time, will correct themselves. Here

are your tasks for to-morrow," indicating an appalling number of pages. "I shall limit myself to explaining, when necessary, the principles to which you must find the particular applications."

There was a pause; Florence began to cry. Then Dolly, a thought more spirited, said, "I am sure my uncle will want us long before we have finished."

"If Sir John really requires you, I shall give you leave to go. But I shall tell him that I object to frivolous interruptions," answered Gertrude, calmly. Her pupils gasped.

"*Tell him!*" Dolly's exclamation died away helplessly; and, leaving them to their amazement, Miss Dallas swept out of the room and into the conservatory.

"I think it is rather a shame of you to put upon those two foolish little things," exclaimed Winifred, with some heat.

"My dear," said Gertrude, examining some japonicas with a critical air, "I know what I am about. The experience of the last six months has not been thrown away upon me. I intend to play second fiddle in the world's orchestra no longer."

Winifred was silent. She had expected some humility.

"I am young, and I think I may flatter myself neither stupid nor ugly," continued Gertrude, turning her rings round her white fingers. "Fate has been against me hitherto, but I shall try to rise superior to it in future."

"Do you intend to work?" asked Winifred, curtly.

"If necessary," answered her friend. "I have come here (and, by-the-bye, I ought to thank you, Winifred, for having been the means, through Dick, of securing me the place), to keep my eyes and ears open. In Paris, where as you know, my life was one long toil, I was a failure. But all that is past. In future I hope to be successful."

Winifred turned, thoroughly chilled and disappointed. Gertrude's vague boasts jarred upon her common-sense and her honesty. Almost she began to ask herself if she had been right in introducing her to The Limes. "Good-bye," she said, rather listlessly, as she held out her hand.

For a moment Gertrude's face wore a softer expression. "You were always kind to me——" she began, when Winifred eagerly interrupted her. "If you would only be true, dear!" she exclaimed, her cheeks flushing and her eyes kindling, as Gertrude yielded her hands to the clasp that had so warmly seized them.

Once more Gertrude's mood changed. "Don't try to recall me to the sylvan glades of sentiment," she said, with a light laugh and a shrug of her graceful shoulders. Those were all very well in our buttercup days, but now our paths have diverged. You are a good soul, Winifred, but you must leave me to go my own road. I promise you not to do anything very base or mean. Cease to distress yourself, dear; I shall not be the less honest for not being 'goody.' Good-bye."

It was quite wonderful to see with what rapidity Gertrude obtained the upper hand of most people at The Limes as the time went on. Her insolent beauty, her grace, her wit and self-possession compelled in Sir John a delighted, in the others a reluctant, homage. When Richard had departed for the Hague, she was installed the greater part of the day in the library, and set to write the notes and transcribe the memoranda that had formerly been the sisters' joy and pride. They, in the schoolroom now, inking their fingers and crying their eyes out over their verbs, relieved their feelings by private grumbling, but dared make no open protest.

Mrs. Hatherley grew daily yellower, thinner, more silent; Mrs. Fane daily more exasperated. The latter lady had indeed tried a passage at arms with the beautiful governess, but she came off second-best. She was no match for Gertrude. Next she tried what a little private aspersion would do with Sir John; but was quick enough to see that there was not much to be gained in that way. So she solaced herself by telling a great deal to Mrs. Hatherley, who listened eagerly and promised secresy.

"Sir John is being completely hood-winked," she said to Winifred. "I suppose Mark will be the next victim. Perhaps he will marry her. Then, I hope you will be satisfied, darling. She ought never to have come here." Winifred listened in silence and pain.

When Mark returned, he did admire Gertrude very much: and lounging away an hour in Winifred's studio one morning, he told her as much with infinite frankness of enthusiasm.

"You have got on famously with your work," he said presently, changing the subject. "That is a nice little head. Quite southern, too, in type. Was your model an Italian?"

"Only half Italian," Winifred answered: and began to relate the circumstances. She was a young girl who had presented herself of her own accord to her one day, as a model, saying she came from London. While painting from her, the girl let out that her father, who was an Englishman, had formerly been as coachman in Sir John's service, that he was now bed-ridden, and he had sent her down to The Limes on a begging errand. She had been roughly received by Sir John, and apparently sent away empty-handed. And being of a timid disposition she had hit upon the ingenious device of offering herself as a model to Winifred and getting *her* to intercede for the money.

"What a strange thing!" exclaimed Mark. "How did she hear of you?"

"I don't know. At your house, I suppose; some of the servants may have gossiped with her. Her mother, an Italian, is dead: her father had married late in life, she said, after quitting Sir John's service."

"What is the man's name?"

"Ridgeley."

"Ridgeley?" mused Mark. "I do not remember him. Perhaps he belongs to the Marleyford days, when I was a boy. They have faded from my memory in a great degree."

"Then I am afraid that you also will be unable to tell me who Mademoiselle Marthe can have been," said the girl, disappointed. "I asked Sir John one day, but he apparently remembered nothing."

Sir John indeed had seemed very much out of humour that day, and Winifred almost fancied—only of course it could only be fancy! —had been a little changed in his manner ever since.

"Who is she?" inquired Mark.

Winifred told him Mademoiselle Marthe's story as much as she knew or guessed of it. He listened, interested in her warmth and evident conviction—interested, too, in her vivid description of the little old woman: but he could not throw much light on the matter.

"Your story recals an incident which took great hold of my childish imagination," he said. "I remember just such a little woman as you describe, coming, like the malignant fairy to the princess's christening, an uninvited guest to Aunt Mary's wedding, and spreading dismay among us. I, a child, was dressed in some absurd costume as a page, and was holding up the bride's train. All at once this poor madwoman, who was, I fancy, a kind of a relative of ours, pressed her way through the crowd and stood looking about her wildly. And, now I come to think of it, her name was Martha also."

"*Martha?*" Winifred dropped her brush and turned to Mark with a startled face. For she remembered that in her ravings Mademoiselle Marthe had called incessantly on "Mary."

CHAPTER XII.

WINIFRED'S DISCOVERIES.

THE idea which Mark had so unconsciously awakened took possession of Winifred's mind. A hundred times a day she cast it from her with horror, but still it returned, strengthened continually by her knowledge of Mrs. Russell's character. Her devotion to her uncle had never availed to blind her to the essential selfishness and heartlessness of his wife. Winifred, with a clearness of insight that came from her own crystal candour, knew her for what she was—shallow, self-indulgent, apathetic habitually, and occasionally violent. Some faint suggestions in Mademoiselle Marthe's ravings, disregarded at the time, came back to Winifred now with all the vividness of proof. Some certainty she felt she must have; she could not live with such a suspicion and not seek to dispel or to confirm it. Mark, she naturally shrank from questioning, a vague instinct warning her that the mystery whose veil she was about to lift, probably involved Sir John as well as his sister. The very notion of some great com-

mitted wrong seemed more probable to Winifred since she had known the courtly owner of The Limes. Every day that handsome face—so impassible and so pallid, so rigid without real strength—had struck her more and more as a mask. Everyday she felt more strongly the hollowness of the man; his vain theatricality, his thin pretensions to be a student and a sage. And even stronger than all this in her was the feeling that he was fundamentally bad. By the very recoil of her expectations regarding him, she had been suddenly illuminated; and coming fresh to the scene, observant and penetrating as she was, she had felt the presence of a secret that fell like an invisible blight upon every member of the family.

That Sir John alone had the key to it, that it concerned him and nobody else, Winifred was sure. Even Mark only betrayed at times a vague perplexity, while as for Dolly and her sister they simply remarked once or twice that of late "Uncle John was somehow changed. Perhaps his heart was worse."

He certainly complained very much oftener of that organ than of old; made more frequent visits to London to consult the specialists on the subject; and was more difficult to approach with any request for help or sympathy. On the other hand his bibliomania greatly increased; and was intensely interested in the results of Richard's trip to the Hague. The young man and he were in constant correspondence; and Sir John made frequent allusion to the number and value of the editions that he was buying.

"Does Dick like Holland?" asked Winifred one evening of Gertrude, moved by a desire to say something amiable to her former friend, with whom she now rarely exchanged a remark.

"I believe so," was the answer. "But he does not write to me."

"But then you see his letters to Sir John," said Mrs. Fane.

"I beg your pardon. I conduct a great deal of Sir John's correspondence, but not that with Richard: I fancy he thinks I don't know how to spell Elzevir," retorted Gertrude, coolly.

"Nevertheless," thought she to herself, "it *is* odd, now I come to think of it, that he never shows me those letters. And he is rather mysterious about a good deal of his correspondence, though I would not admit it before these women for the world."

"The member for Walford is dead, sir," said Mark, a little later, to his father.

"So I see. Do you still intend to stand?"

"I think so. I shall go to London to-morrow, and then run down to the place itself and set things en train. Of course, I shall be beaten, but even that is a beginning," continued the young man.

Winifred looked up quickly. So that was why Mark had adopted no profession. He intended himself for political life. She looked at his broad brow, and his grave, resolute face, almost as handsome as, and yet so different from Sir John's; and already her imagination

saw him in the arena victorious. He met her glance, and while his own brightened at her manifest sympathy, she dropped her eyes with a sudden blush, and a sudden thrill that was half shy and half delightful. She was rather angry with herself for this emotion; and she had never been in love. In her student days she had regarded the ardent youths who adored her with a scornful indulgence, half motherly, half school-boyish, that had sent them nearly out of their minds.

Shortly after Mark's departure, Winifred went to spend a week or two in London with a young lady-artist whom she had known in Paris. There, in the studio, she again met the young model. She had reached that stage of her picture when she required more models than it was convenient to bring down to Elmsleigh.

Among the most frequent of these was that Mariuccia Ridgeley, the daughter of Sir John's former coachman. She was a pretty little thing, full of wilful ways and a fitful Southern grace, and talked a great deal about herself and her sick father.

"He is much worse," she said one day, shaking her head mournfully. "And the doctor orders so many things that I cannot afford to get him. He has written again to Sir John: would the signorina mind asking if the letter had been received?"

Winifred had a great objection to asking anything of the kind; and preferred helping Mr. Ridgeley as much as she could out of her own slender purse. She even tried to point out to Mariuccia that the mere fact of having been a coachman once in Sir John's service did not entitle her father to be supported by that gentleman for the term of his natural life.

"Ah! but Sir John has helped my father often," said Mariuccia. "He used to send him money whenever he asked for it, big sums—ten pounds—twenty pounds ——"

Winifred was greatly surprised. Of all the perplexing people she had ever known, Sir John was the most inscrutable. Just as she had made up her mind that he was close and near, some act of generosity on his part would reach her. But one day the girl came with a different request—that Miss Power would kindly visit him. "I really think he is dying," she added.

It was a foggy afternoon when Winifred turned her steps towards the man's lodgings. They were in a street not very far from the British Museum. Mariuccia gave her a glad welcome, and ushered her into the little kitchen where Ridgeley was sitting. She found him a man of big, burly frame, that contrasted mournfully with his evident weakness. He was propped up by pillows in an arm-chair, and it was evident that every breath he drew was a torture to him.

"I have to thank you, ma'am, for your kindness," he began, slowly, when Winifred was seated, "but I cannot afford much breath."

She began some words of comfort, when he stopped her with a gesture. "There isn't much comfort for me now in the world, miss.

The best thing I can do is to leave it. What I wanted to say was, will you ask Sir John Hatherley for fifty pounds. I don't want it for myself; but for *her*," and he nodded towards Mariuccia.

Winifred stared at him in speechless amazement. Was he mad, to ask for such a sum and in such a tone? He was watching her face quite coolly, and seemed fully to expect an answer. "I could not think of making any such request," she said at last. "And moreover it would be useless."

"I would not trouble you," pursued Ridgeley, quite undisturbed by her refusal, "but you see my hands," and she noticed that they lay motionless and paralysed. "I cannot write myself, and I don't like to trust anybody else to *write* (he laid a stress on the word) what I now have to say."

"You must find some other messenger," said Winifred. But she spoke gently, for speech had so increased his asthma that it was pain to sit and watch him.

"Nay, ma'am, you *must* speak," he gasped, using the words not imperiously, but because he obviously was too weak to try persuasion. "Tell him, please, that I say in the old days he was readier with his money; *and that he knows the cost of refusal.*"

"That sounds like a threat," said Winifred, haughtily.

"It is one," Ridgeley answered.

More reluctant than ever now to undertake any such mission, she rose and turned to the door. The man, past all speech looked at her imploringly, while his face turned of an ashen grey, and his breathing filled the room with a grating sound, like the creaking of some cruel machine. All at once Winifred turned and again approached him, impelled by a new idea.

"Tell me," she said, almost vehemently, as though conjuring his answer to find voice. "When you lived with Sir John Hatherley, was there any member of his family called Martha?"

He bent his head in assent.

"And," continued Winifred, beginning to tremble with excitement, "did they work her any wrong?" He made the same sign. She stood looking at him, uncertain what to ask next, and possessed with a sudden scruple at what she had asked already.

He raised himself with an effort, and laboriously bringing out each word, as though it were wrung from the grasp of a vice, he whispered: "Bring—me—the—money—and—before—I die—I—will—clear—Miss—Freake."

Freake—Martha Freake! So that was the name. With scarcely so much as the ceremony of a nod to Mariuccia, Winifred hurried away, feeling now that though the knowledge she had wanted was hers, she had gained it by unworthy means. What right had she to spy into Sir John's past? The question presented itself to her for the first time, and she realised at the same moment how completely possessed she had been by the suspicion that had filled her mind for days. She

wished she had never gone near Ridgeley; she almost wished that she had never known Martha Freake.

In much turmoil of feeling, Winifred returned to Elmsleigh, her visit being over.

One of Mrs. Chandos-Fane's peculiarities was that she always opened her daughter's letters. Winifred had entered one or two protests, but as she did not really prize her correspondence very highly, the only letters that she ever insisted on keeping to herself were her Uncle Walter's. And fortunately, these Mrs. Chandos-Fane did not care to read: they were too clever for her. She opened one (in a strange handwriting) the morning after Winifred's return.

That same evening at The Limes, Mr. Burton not being there to absorb her attention, Mrs. Fane lost herself in contemplation of Sir John, who had not pleased her of late. Sir John had sat for some time in deep reflection, rubbing his white hands softly one over the other, when he broke silence by addressing Miss Dallas.

"Did I tell you your brother had returned to Paris?"

"Indeed?"

"Yes. He has transacted my business really admirably at the Hague. I was greatly pleased with his letter this morning."

Mrs. Hatherley here audibly sighed. The last letter she had received had been a demand (the third) for immediate payment from her dressmaker; but although she had left the open bill on Sir John's table, he had taken no notice of it, and draw his attention to it more openly she dared not.

Unfortunately the word "letter" had awakened an association also in the mind of Mrs. Fane.

"Winifred had a strange letter this morning," she remarked. "Did you tell Sir John about it, my dear?"

Winifred's blood froze in her veins. The letter had been from Mariuccia, asking, on her father's part, if the message concerning the money had been given. What, in the name of all that was tactless, did her mother mean by speaking of it?

"What was there to tell me?" asked Sir John sharply.

Winifred plucked up heart of grace. Something she would tell him, and perhaps his answer would disperse her doubts. "My letter was from a girl—a model, Sir John. Her father, Ridgeley, was once in your service. He wishes you to help him."

In the pause that ensued Mrs. Hatherley turned pale with annoyance. Another applicant, while every request of hers was refused!

"How much does Ridgeley want?" asked Sir John raspingly. "*Of course* money is the object of his message. I know what this kind of application means."

"He is ill," said Winifred. "Very ill indeed."

"Well?—How much?"

"Fifty pounds." Winifred wondered if her heart-beats could be heard through the silence.

Sir John gave a short, sarcastic laugh. "This Ridgeley was an honest fellow enough, but he has been unfortunate," was his observation. "I may give you a cheque for him to-morrow, Miss Power; but I trust I shall have no other application of the kind from you."

The cheque, enclosed in an envelope directed to herself, was duly delivered into her hands next morning by one of the footmen of The Limes. It was for fifty pounds. Winifred, astounded at the generosity, resolved to carry the money herself: it would not take her long to run up to London and back: and she started without loss of time. On reaching her destination and climbing to the top of the house, she was struck with the stillness within. Generally Mariuccia's voice was to be heard blithely singing; but now there was not a sound. She knocked, and the girl came herself to open the door. She was weeping violently, and on recognising Winifred, exclaimed "Oh! signorina, you are too late. He is dead."

"Dead!"

Softly following the grief-stricken girl, Winifred entered the bedroom. A little stunned, she sat down and holding Mariuccia's hand, stroked it softly in silent sympathy.

"It happened late last night," sobbed Mariuccia. "He was sorry to go, but sorry only for me. He said I was to tell you something which he never told while he was alive, for fear of punishment—but now it does not matter who knows."

Involuntarily Winifred's grasp tightened round the hand she held. "Yes. Go on, child."

"I was to say that Sir John and his sister and my father once perjured themselves to spare Miss Hatherley disgrace, and they got Miss Freake sentenced to imprisonment, and all because she knew too much about Sir John's marriage."

The words, interrupted by tears, but repeated with a quiet indifference like a lesson learnt by rote, for a moment made Winifred feel dizzy. Recovering, she poured forth a string of rapid questions, but Mariuccia could not answer them. "That was all he said," she repeated mournfully, then laid her head down, and let her sobs break out afresh.

"Are you alone?" asked Winifred when she rose to go.

"Some of the neighbours look in," Mariuccia replied listlessly. Winifred took a sovereign out of her own purse and laid it upon the table. She had the cheque in her pocket, but without Sir John's consent, she did not feel justified in giving so large a sum to the girl: so promising future help, if needed, she went.

She had plenty to think of as she walked through the streets. The possibility of doubt no longer remained to her, and she was in a white heat of indignation at Sir John. She would not stop amid such dishonest people, she said, impulsively; she would go away from Elmsleigh.

She remembered the quiver of passionate resentment with which

she had listened to Martha's ravings in the fever, and condemned in her heart the unknown wrong-doer who had wrecked that innocent life. Was she to be less severe now that she knew who the wrong-doer was? Then, with a quick catching of her breath, a sudden sharp pang, she thought of Mark, and unconsciously quickened her step.

In the high-strung mood produced by these meditations Winifred reached home. On entering the little drawing-room, she found Mrs. Fane sitting alone in the blaze of the firelight, apparently lost in thought. Another time Winifred might have noticed the quick, rather excited way, in which she looked up on her daughter's entrance: but the girl was too much absorbed in her own feelings. She suddenly leant her head down against her mother's knee, while her eyes filled with an unexpected rush of tears. The tears Mrs. Chandos-Fane did not see, but she gently moved her daughter's head away, saying, "Take care, my love. I have on my new dress."

"Have you been out?" Winifred asked, sitting upright, her eyes quite dry again.

"Yes. Mr. Burton has had a really delightful afternoon tea."

"Delightful?" Winifred had a vivid, rapid vision of the old maids principally composing the party, of Mr. Burton rubicund and complacent in the midst of them, and of all the gossip from mild to malignant talked.

"*I* thought so. Of course, it was all very conventional; so, perhaps, you would not have enjoyed it. I do not complain of you, my love. Of course, there are things that I should like to change in you, but—Ah well! it's no matter."

"Dear mother!" exclaimed Winifred, feeling rather disconcerted.

"I never grudged you to my suffering brother—never," resumed Mrs. Fane, as if struck with the recollection of her own magnanimity. "I resigned you cheerfully; for those who know me best have never thought me selfish. But I am not strong-minded—and pushing—and masculine; and it is not to be wondered at, I think, if I sometimes feel lonely."

At this point of her self-analysis, she produced her pocket-handkerchief; Winifred was fairly melted. "Dearest mother! I am so sorry—I never thought—I never dreamed ——"

"I don't complain, my love. I have said so before. You are rather wilful and headstrong; you have a harder nature than mine. How should you understand what I was feeling?"

"But in future I will try to understand. We will be more to one another," faltered Winifred, honestly wondering where her fault had been.

"Too late!" said Mrs. Fane, shaking her head impressively. "You should try to bear in mind, dear, that there is a tide in the affairs of men. Who says that? Some charming poet, I am sure. If we let that tide ebb, we are stranded. Your poor little mother is called to a higher duty. I am going to be married."

Winifred gave a gasp. "Mamma! To Mr. Burton?"

"Yes, dear. I feel how unworthy I am of him. But I cannot resist the temptation of a little happiness, and I have promised to be his wife. The wedding, for reasons of Mr. Burton's, is to be immediate. You must sacrifice your painting for once to mamma, and assist me with the trousseau." And Winifred was too much astonished to say more.

After dinner she went round with her mother to The Limes, making up her mind that it should be her last visit. She would return Sir John his cheque, and just tell Mark how sorry she was that he had lost his election. He had returned that day, defeated. It was only natural that she should assure him of her sympathy with his disappointment.

Mark came forward to meet her with a pleasure very quietly displayed, but of which she had learnt to read the signs. He cut short her condolence by saying with a smile that he never expected to be victorious, and added, "I am so glad to be back, that the election seems like a tiresome dream." He spoke with a grave, significant tenderness, but she did not respond by so much as a glance.

On the contrary she turned away abruptly, determined not to unclose her heart to a hope that, once admitted, might choke all her valiant resolutions. She had done with the Hatherleys and could make no exceptions: that was what she told herself.

Sir John was sitting as usual a little apart, and crossing the room with a swift step, Winifred paused beside his chair. He looked up at her with some surprise, struck perhaps by her pallor and the light of suppressed excitement in her shining eyes. She took the cheque from her pocket, and handed it to him. "Ridgeley is dead," she whispered in low tones; and if her suspicions had needed any further confirmation she would have found it in the brief but unmistakable flash of relief that illumined her hearer's face. He took the cheque from her in silence, still keeping his eyes fixed on her, but more, she fancied in defiance than in inquiry.

"He has left his daughter in great poverty," continued Winifred.

"I have nothing to do with his daughter," was the frigid reply.

"If he did not prosper, it was perhaps because of his wickedness," said Winifred. She began to tremble as she spoke, all the smouldering indignation within her again catching flame.

"Was he wicked?" Sir John carelessly asked.

"If you consider wickedness that which you all did to poor Martha Freake."

Winifred had hardly spoken the words, when Sir John rose from his chair and confronted her with a glance of scathing contempt. She recoiled from it as from a blow.

"You have come to my own house to insult me, Miss Power?"

The reproach was not unmerited, and Winifred felt it. She had spoken in the impulse of temper, and would have given worlds now to recall her words. Sir John had spoken distinctly; it was heard by the others in dismay; they gathered round.

"What is all this?" exclaimed Mark.

Sir John spoke up. "It is this," he said, haughtily. "Many years ago, a member of our family, Martha Freake, disgraced herself by writing anonymous threatening letters for the purpose of extorting from me a sum of money to cover an act of culpable negligence, if nothing worse, on her own part. She was brought to trial for it: it could not be avoided: and sentenced to a short term of imprisonment. But ere she entered on it, reason failed her, and she was transferred from prison to an asylum. I paid for her there, and would have continued to maintain her after her recovery and dismissal, but she rejected my offers and went to live abroad. I had never expected to be reminded of her, in the manner of to-night. But Miss Power, who appears to have a liking for the society of models and of servants, has been exercising their lively, if not exalted imaginations at my expense: armed with the startling information acquired in this underhand way, she seeks by deliberately insulting me to vindicate the character of a maniac and do the bidding of a coachman."

Everybody turned to look at the object of this denunciation. She stood perfectly still, very pale and grieved, but not subdued.

"I do not understand," exclaimed Mark, angry and perplexed.

"Nor I," added Mrs. Fane's dulcet tones. "But if my poor dear child has been so unfortunate as to offend Sir John ——"

"Please, mother, do not try to set things right," Winifred interrupted steadily. "For the manner of my offence I ask Sir John's pardon. The feelings which impelled me to my unfortunate speech are not so superficial that a word can dispel them. But I can, at least, promise, and I do, never to obtrude them on anybody here again, for this is my last visit to The Limes."

She turned in her impetuosity and walked straight away from the room and the house.

They had all been too much astonished to stop her. Gertrude was the first to speak—good naturedly.

"That is Winifred all over. She is a fine creature, but often in heroics."

"Do pray excuse her, Sir John," added Mrs. Fane. "Dear Mrs. Hatherley, you don't know my impulsive, good-hearted girl." Mrs. Hatherley did not answer. Her eyes had a strange glitter, and she looked uncommonly wide awake.

Nobody else spoke, and the silence became, at last, so oppressive that Mrs. Fane was fain to break it with a lady-like outburst of sobs. At the first sound of these Sir John vanished to the library, Mark followed him, and Florence was made happy by being asked to bring her smelling-bottle to the rescue.

Winifred meanwhile in the darkness and solitude of her own sitting-room, was sitting by the spent fire and weeping her heart out in the mere physical reaction of her late excitement. She felt angry with herself, yet not altogether sorry. At the sound of the door-bell

she roused herself, thinking that it must be her mother, and nerving herself for a scene. But to her great surprise, who should walk in but Dolly, panting and in a remarkable state of excitement.

"Oh, dear Miss Power," she exclaimed, sinking breathlessly on to a stool at Winifred's side, "I hope you will excuse me, but I came because I really felt I must. Everybody is so angry at The Limes—Uncle John shut up in the library—Mark looking *dreadful* —your mother in tears. She says perhaps you will be going back to Paris."

"Did she say that?"

"Yes. And I want you—if you do go—to take me with you."

"And what in the world would you do in Paris?" asked Winifred.

"Paint plates and fans and things," replied Dolly promptly. "Painting in water-colours is my one small talent."

Winifred smiled with melancholy amusement. She had often suspected that Dolly was not quite such a nonentity as her sister, but she had not been prepared for an outburst like this, and wondered what had inspired it.

"Do you want to get away from your governess, Dorothy?"

"No—that's not it. Not altogether. I should like to be independent, to earn money."

Winifred shook her head as she looked down at the small daintily-dressed figure, and the pink-and-white, pretty Dresden-china face.

"Oh, don't discourage me, dear, *dear* Miss Power," exclaimed the girl, clasping her hands, with tears in her eyes. "When Uncle John dies I am convinced that we shall be paupers; he will be sure not to leave us anything. I will be no burden to you. I will live on bread and water, I will sweep your rooms, I will ——"

"Hush! If there be any way of managing your enterprise, I will not discourage it, you may be sure. But indeed I do not know what I am going to do. Dolly, answer me frankly—have you no other motive for wishing to go than this, and the general weariness of life at The Limes?"

Dolly was very honest. She hung her head in silence.

"Am I to flatter myself that you are inspired by affection for *me?*" continued Winifred playfully.

"I like you very much."

"But somebody else better?"

Again Dolly was mute.

"Well, well," said Winifred, laying her hand on the pretty little head. "I will bear you in mind. And meanwhile (just to amuse you, you understand), I will read you a letter from Richard Dallas."

(*To be continued.*)

AN INCIDENT FROM LIFE.

HOW damp and cold and foggy it was in Lambeth Palace Road one December evening. It was terribly noisy too, for huge carts, laden with heavy goods from the South-Western railway terminus hard by, rattled incessantly over the stones, and everybody hurried along to be out of the thoroughfare as soon as possible.

Three little urchins formed an exception to the bustling crowd, for they lingered for more than an hour round the big iron gates of St. Thomas' Hospital, in spite of the constant knocks and pushes they received; custom having made them almost unconscious of such treatment. Besides, the attraction which kept them there was a powerful one. They had actually witnessed, whilst they waited, the arrival of no less than three Christmas trees! Two of them, it is true, were only young fir-trees dug up from a plantation somewhere in the country and sent straight to the hospital, there to be dressed up in all their attractive finery; but the third tree was a present from the wife of one of the consulting physicians, and was already trimmed and decorated and covered with toys.

There was some delay in moving it from the light cart and carrying it into the building; and so the three small boys outside had time for a long look at it, in all its beauty. One must be a child to understand what that beauty is; coloured flags, gold and silver balls, dolls, trumpets, candles, crackers, sweeties—they need a child's imagination to be appreciated; but we may, perhaps, happily have enough of it left in us to know how much they convey to him.

The boys on the sticky pavement outside gave a long-drawn sigh as the beautiful tree went out of sight; and they turned away to their own usual surroundings: mud, fog, cold, discomfort, such as they had been accustomed to all through their short lives.

"My!" said one of them, Jimmy by name; "wouldn't I just like to be sick in there, and 'ave that there tree to play with!"

It was a sentiment echoed by the other two as they edged themselves along the railing of the hospital, making their way back towards the room they usually slept in in Lambeth.

"Well, we aint sick," said another of them, called Peter, although the harsh, dry voice he spoke in and his white, wan face might have told another tale.

"And so we aint got no tree!" said the third boy, Bill. They had almost reached the corner of Westminster Bridge, in depressed silence, when Pet—as he was commonly called—suddenly stopped, and, with a smile which was pleasing enough to see, although his companions did not notice it, exclaimed:

"Aint I got a hidea!"

After which statement, he propounded it to his attentive audience, ideas being, if not rare, always interesting to boys. And certainly Pet's was original and worthy of consideration.

He suggested that one of them should feign to be ill, should get taken into the hospital, and, when once there, should see the tree in all its glory.

The plan sounded delightful, the only objection to it being that they could not all play the principal part in it. They decided who should be the lucky one by the all-popular method of tossing, and Pet won the toss. This was fortunate, for besides having distinctly the first right to his own idea, which the lad did not think of, he was the only one of the three who would have been capable of acting his part: but Pet did not know this either.

He only gave Jimmy and Bill a few hints as to what they were to do, how they were to look as scared as possible when Bill's father came home at night, and how they were to say they knew nothing of Pet, except that he was suddenly "took bad."

Whereupon the "taking" promptly occurred, and with a thud, that was unexpected even to Jimmy and Bill, Pet threw himself down at full length on the pavement. A small crowd instantly collected round them. Most of the people only stared a moment and then passed on; one or two expressed pity; and after a few moments, the inevitable policeman arrived, and pushed his way up to Pet's side, roughly questioning Jimmy and Bill. They whimpered a bit and looked frightened —to order, and the policeman after rolling Pet over with his foot, and finding him apparently altogether unconscious, said he must go to the hospital; and with the help of a good-natured bystander, himself carried him there: Jimmy and Bill and several others following.

It was something to be inside those great walls as Jimmy and Bill, and Pet, too, thought, while the latter was being carried by the porter on a stretcher into the casualty ward, and a big bell was rung for Number One—that is, a young dresser always handy, who sees a case first, and, if it be trifling, attends to it, without sending for the house surgeon. But of Pet the dresser could make nothing at all, and he soon called the house surgeon, who came running down from the top of the high building, and applied himself with the rapidity of a hard-worked man to the consideration of the case before him. He did not look over thirty, but there was an amount of prompt decision, a firmness and a gentleness in his touch of Pet, which spoke well for the use he had made of his head and of his heart. The policeman stated what he knew, and was dismissed, while the surgeon looked for all the most likely symptoms in Pet, and was able to find none of them. The patient was simply unconscious. The boys were asked whether Pet had been ill before he fell down suddenly, and they said: "No, only the cough!"

And as they both cried, or howled steadily, all the time, the dresser sent them away, telling them they might come the next morning to

hear what was the matter with their friend. They, not sorry to get their dismissal after the surgeon had arrived on the scene, scampered off.

Then the surgeon, systematically and very patiently, indeed, began at Pet's head and examined him down to his feet to find some cause for this extraordinary unconsciousness—and could discover none. Disease he found indeed, for the poor little fellow's lungs were half gone, but as he said to the dresser: "Boys don't drop down unconscious from that!" Being strangely baffled, the surgeon ordered Pet to be taken to the children's ward, undressed, and put to bed.

"We'll see what we can make of him then!" he said.

It was not by any means easy for Pet to keep up his acting, especially when strong ammonia was put under his nose and almost boiling water to his feet, but he managed it, more now from pride than from longing after the Christmas tree, even. Only when he was lifted by the nurse into a soft, clean, warm bed, such as he had never dreamt of before, that small closed mouth of his involuntarily parted, and something very like a smile, like the ghost of a smile, stole over his face.

The surgeon, noticing it, was struck with the idea that the boy might be shamming.

"Fetch the battery here," he said.

Pet did not know what a battery meant, or his smile would certainly have disappeared as involuntarily as it had come.

The surgeon waited by his side, holding his small hand and thinking to himself that, shamming or not shamming, Pet had the most pathetic face he had met with in all his experience of sadness and suffering.

Then the battery was brought and a slight shock was administered from it down Pet's back.

"Oh! that was horrible!" thought the lad. "What was it? Would it come again?"

He managed not to wince under it the first time. A second and a harder shock was given. Pet did not quite scream, but he pressed his fingers so hard into the house surgeon's hand that the latter knew he was right in his conjecture. Then a third shock was given—a stronger one, and this time Pet sprang out of bed with tears starting to his eyes, and exclaimed:

"Oh! don't do it again; don't do it again!"

One or two students round were laughing, but the surgeon did not see anything but pathos in the scene, as he said gravely:

"Then you are not ill, and have been giving us all this trouble for nothing. Why did you do it?"

He wanted the lad to tell the truth; and of course to him Pet did.

"Please sir," he said, not crying now, but looking straight with his great grey eyes into the doctor's face, "'twas the tree, the Christmas

tree, as I wanted to see so awful bad! Me and Jimmy and Bill, we seed it a carried into here, all beautiful, and, and—I did want to see it again!"

"And so you pretended to be ill, that you might come in here, and——"

"Yes, sir."

"And what am I to do with you now, do you think?"

"Turn me out again," said Pet promptly.

There was something very like a quiver in the surgeon's voice, as he said with infinite tenderness:

"No, my lad, I shan't do that to you; you shall see the Christmas tree in here. You are not what you pretended to be, but you are quite ill enough to stay in the ward until after Christmas time, and then we will see!"

And so Pet had his Christmas tree, and Jimmy and Bill came in at the surgeon's invitation to see it too—but Pet did not go back with them, after it, to Lambeth. He never left the hospital again, for consumption ran a rapid course with him, and before three months were over, he died in the ward.

H. F.

GOETHE.

Be it the flesh in travail vaguely crying,
Or a stern watchword wrested from the strife;
We watch and wait when mighty men are dying,
For their last word wherewith to lock their life.

The Titan child of singing and of science,
The calm strong soul, the Modern and the Greek,
Lay bowed before Death's face, that took reliance,
Beauty, and strength, and left him very weak.

The dim eyes stir, the pale lips move and mutter;
Cluster, O friends, and catch the words of might;
Darkly man falters; open wide the shutter;
Shall not the day-dawn come? "More Light! More Light!"

Victor Plarr.

MY TERRIBLE WEDDING-DAY.

AT the house of my dear old friend and patron, Dr. Grey, I first met Edgar Harrington.

We fell in love with each other at first sight.

About two months before my tale commences, Mr. Harrington had come from the south of England to Leascar as assistant engineer to the new line of railway in process of construction along the coast, a rival line to that which already connected our small seaside village with the large commercial city of N——.

I, Léonie Sylvestre, was at this time nineteen. My mother—an Englishwoman—died at my birth. My father—a French professor of music, many years resident in Leascar—had been dead about twelve months; and I, having a good voice and considerable knowledge of music, maintained myself by giving lessons to the principal inhabitants of this small north-east coast watering-place. I hated teaching, however, and lacked patience for the drudgery entailed; therefore when Mr. Harrington asked me to become his wife, even had I loved him less, I believe I could have married him.

"Miss Sylvestre! Léonie! I must walk home with you to-night," Mr. Harrington whispered, as he turned a page of my music on one memorable evening at a whist and musical party given by Dr. Grey.

His tones and looks caused my heart to beat loud with hope, for they told me more plainly than his words had ever done—he loved me. Making, therefore, some excuse to my usual escort from these weekly gatherings, I dismissed her: Edgar and I walking alone together for almost the first time in our lives.

"Léonie, do you love me? Do you love me well enough to follow me to the world's end?" he asked in an agitated voice, the moment we were outside Dr. Grey's gate.

"Must I—*follow* you?" And a wave of gladness seemed to sweep over me as I raised my eyes to his in the November moonlight.

"No, my darling," was his answer; "*go* with me, I should have said. And you will—I read it in your face. God bless you for that! Yesterday I dared not have asked you such a question, for I was a poor man, then. To-day my prospects have brightened. I received a letter this morning offering me an appointment in India which will make a rich man of me. But, if I accept the post, I am bound in honour to leave England on Wednesday next. Will you—can you—trust your life's happiness to my keeping?"

I answered at my heart's dictation, "Yes."

Then Edgar gave me to understand that he had no relations

in the world, and we rejoiced mutually that we were thus completely arbiters of our own fate. No one had a right to mar our plans.

"A clever, rising young fellow in his profession, doubtless," said Dr. Grey to me, when he had heartily congratulated me on my engagement, "and a gentleman all over. But he has no head for *whist*."

Whist being the doctor's favourite recreation, he was accustomed to make it rather a test point of a man's ability. My answer was inevitable.

"I do not care for whist, doctor."

"And you do care for Edgar Harrington? Then marry him and be happy. I make only one proviso, and that is—I must myself give the bride away!"

Little enough time was there for preparations, but Edgar undertook to make all necessary arrangements; even to the ordering of my India outfit which was to be ready on our arrival in London.

On Saturday I said my last good-bye to my lover—so soon to be my husband—when he told me it would be impossible to see me again until we met in church on Monday morning; but the certainty that on Monday we two were to be made one for ever caused me to think lightly of the few hours' separation.

Lightly? Ah, how little did I dream of the terrible catastrophe destined to happen in that interim!

As it will be necessary later in my story for you to have some idea of Edgar's personal appearance, I will endeavour to describe him here. In figure slight and agile, he was rather under than above the medium height. His complexion a clear olive, with eyes that were deep-set, dark, expressive, and a nose in outline almost Grecian. A heavy, drooping, dark moustache entirely concealed his mouth. His manner, naturally retiring, in company almost approached shyness; but at all times he had a quiet way of deferring to the opinions or prejudices of those with whom he talked which showed itself in strong contrast to the rougher, more rugged manners of the north-country men.

I rose early on Monday morning—long before daylight—and was ready in my travelling-dress when Dr. Grey called for me in his carriage. I remember leaning on his arm as I walked up the aisle of the little country church. I remember seeing, as in a dream, in the early and still misty morning light, a solitary figure standing just outside the altar rails, next whom I took my place. The service at once commenced and proceeded to the close.

Will any married woman who has read thus far, try and remember if, during the ceremony, she looked at the face of the man to whom she was being united? I believe most women would tell me they never raised their eyes. Any how, this was my case. The ring was on my finger, the blessing given; I was led to the vestry on the bridegroom's arm. A timepiece chiming as we entered gave warning that it was

later than we expected. Dr. Grey jocularly hurried us forward to sign our names.

Edgar wrote his, and placed the pen between my fingers. After writing my old signature for the last time, I looked up at my husband, then stared bewildered, startled at the change I saw in him. At the first glance I scarcely recognised him, the lower part of his face being completely altered. His dark moustache—the admiration of all the girls in Leascar—had disappeared.

A deep flush spread itself over his countenance as his eyes met mine. He bit his under lip and looked away.

When the last farewells to the few kind friends who saw us off at Leascar station had been spoken, and the train had started for N——, an uncomfortable feeling of embarrassment crept over me on finding myself alone with Edgar. He would have taken my hand, but involuntarily I drew back; then, seeing his look of chagrined surprise, I suffered him to kiss me, but could not repress a slight shiver as he did so.

"Why do you shrink from me, Léonie?" he asked reproachfully.

"For the silliest reason in the world, when put into words," I answered, quite happy and laughing now, with a sudden, strange revulsion. "Only because the man I promised to marry had a moustache, and you have none. What unreasoning, foolish creatures we are! But it changes your face so completely that I hardly knew you."

"You are quite sure you have no other reason?" he inquired, with more earnestness apparently than the question needed.

"Quite sure. What other reason could I have? But you had no right to make such a change in your appearance without my leave, Edgar—the very day of our marriage! Why did you do it?" I asked playfully; all the time looking at him intently, and trying to learn his face over again, and, as it were, get used to it.

"I will tell my darling all about it some day—when we are far away upon the sea. Would we were there now!" he added fervently. And I noticed that his lips trembled nervously after he had spoken.

In less than half an hour we reached N——. There we had barely time to take our seats in the ten o'clock express for London. It was not possible to have a compartment to ourselves. An old gentleman, white-headed, spectacled, with the best-tempered looking face I almost ever saw, occupied that which we entered. He was enveloped in rugs, and studying his newspaper with the deepest attention. Except by a swift, expressive glance from a pair of deep-set, small black eyes he did not appear to notice our intrusion.

Stocks and shares, parliamentary debates, or what?—for it was not a comic paper he was reading—I wondered vaguely, as I watched the ruddy, jovial face. Edgar spoke to me in whispers from time to time, but the consciousness of being a bride and the fear of being recognised as one by our fellow traveller made me reluctant to respond.

Shortly before arriving at York the old gentleman coughed, took off

his spectacles, and leaning forward, with a pleasant smile, offered me his newspaper. I was about to take it when Edgar interpose by reaching out his hand. The old man looked surprised.

"Ha! I believe I have another." And, with a twinkle in his eyes, opening his bag, he took one out and held it towards me.

It was impossible to resist a mischievous glance at Edgar, as, settling myself in my corner, I turned over the large sheets, preparatory to reading it. But again my newly-made husband interposed. Again he took the paper from me. "Léonie," he said authoritatively, "don't read in the train. Please. I ask you not."

Too bad of Edgar! Was it because I could not talk with him in whispers that he sought to punish me? But the words so lately spoken: "Love, honour, and obey," came to my mind, and I quietly yielded.

We lunched at York. Afterwards, as I stood alone by the book-stall, our fellow traveller came up to me.

"Choosing a novel, my dear?" he asked, in the fatherly way that old men sometimes adopt even to a stranger, and which somehow one rather likes to hear. "Take my advice—*don't.* Look here," he added, pointing with his walking-stick to a conspicuous white placard, whereon large black letters announced the latest news; "save the money you were about to spend on a novel, and buy a penny paper instead. Can any novel hold out such promises as those? Why, that alone," he went on, arresting his stick at the words: HORRIBLE DISCOVERY. *A lady supposed to have been murdered in a railway carriage. The murderer at large.* "That alone is sufficient sensation for a whole journey. A three-volume romance lies hidden under those few words. But the truth will out. Sooner or later the British public will know all about it. Did you ever read De Quincy's 'Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts?'"

"No!" I answered, looking at him in wonder, and feeling half amused, half surprised at being so addressed by a stranger.

"I was quite a young fellow, quite, when I first read it," he went on, "but it made such an impression on me that I took to studying murder from that day. Don't be alarmed. I only took to *studying* it, I tell you; and when I want a little relaxation for my mind I study it now. There's nothing better calculated to take one out of oneself than to enter heart and soul into a downright, regular, atrocious murder case. Bless you, there's not one taken place these fifty years that I haven't followed with absorbing interest, and I know more about them than judge and jury and all the rest of them put together —not omitting the murderer himself, mayhap. Ha!" he exclaimed, "the London papers! Now then for 'further particulars.'" And he turned to select some newly placed upon the stall.

"Léonie! What are you doing there? I thought I had lost you. Come!" cried Edgar, more impatiently than I had ever heard him speak, as he dragged me towards the carriage. What could have come over him?

I had abundant food for thought for some time after this. The subject of it—Edgar. It was not his appearance only that was changed. It was himself. He was irritable. He looked harassed, worried, ill. The important post he had accepted no doubt brought anxieties, and held responsibilities which weighed on him, and as yet he had had no chance to explain the nature of them to me. But, in the meanwhile, could he not put them from him for a little space? Was it not rather hard on *me* that he should be so taken up with them to-day—our wedding-day?

"Bless me! bless *me!*" ejaculated our fellow traveller presently, laying down his paper and turning his beaming countenance full upon me.

"I hope you have found the supposed murder case a real one, and as thrilling as you expected, sir?" I asked, with interest.

"I anticipate it will prove the best mental distraction I have had for years," he answered emphatically. "As your husband objects to your reading in the train, young lady, I will tell you the facts as far as they have come to light. On Saturday when the late train from the north arrived in London, a lady was found in a first class carriage, dead, under more than suspicious circumstances. The supposed murderer ——"

"Murderer? How do you know she was murdered?" interrupted Edgar excitedly.

"I do not know it. As yet no one knows it. I am only telling what the newspapers say. But I'll take care I know a good deal more before I am many hours older. In the meanwhile, with your leave, I will relate ——"

"But you have not my leave. On the contrary, I request you will not mention such—an unpleasant subject before—my wife." How strange, how uncourteous, how unlike all I had ever seen or heard of Edgar!

"Dear me! I'm exceedingly sorry, I'm sure. You don't like murders?"

"Certainly not. I hate them."

Whereon the old man settled himself into his corner to sleep, a placid smile upon his good-natured face, and when I was sure of being unobserved I crept closer to Edgar, and slipped my hand in his. "I wish we were at our journey's end. I wish we were far, far, upon the sea!" I whispered, hoping thus to soothe him.

"How fervently I wish it, God only knows," he answered in the same low tones, drawing me to him; and I trembled as I looked up into his anxious face. Suddenly a terrible, scarcely defined fear assailed me. "Edgar," I whispered, "you are not surely afraid that anything will—will—part us, now?"

"Would *you* allow anything to part us, Léonie?" he inquired sadly.

"No power on earth!" I answered. And though he did not speak, I knew that he believed me.

At about a quarter to five o'clock the train thundered into the railway station at King's Cross. The afternoon had been unusually dark and gloomy. A dense fog was setting in. The lamps were lighted.

Our fellow traveller, rousing from his long slumber, collected his papers and placed them in his travelling-bag. As he closed the lid, he took hold of a label attached and turned it over, thus exposing the address. Without the least desire to do so, I could not help seeing what was written. It was this: "Septimus Gooderingham, Charing Cross Hotel."

The hotel we were going to ourselves. He threw his rug over his arm, took up his bag, then looking round at us, raised his hat and smiled. The next moment he was lost in the crowd.

"Any luggage, sir?" asked a porter as Edgar helped me out of the carriage.

"Yes. Darling, stay here a moment while I go and see to it."

So saying, my husband went off with the porter towards the luggage-van, and I was left standing under the full glare of a gas lamp, alone.

The moments lengthened into minutes, and with every minute the crowd grew less. Cab after cab, close by where I stood, laden with boxes, drove off in turn. After what appeared an age, at length I saw three persons coming quickly towards me. The middle one was Edgar. Plainly enough I could see three faces in the gas-light. My husband's was pale and drawn, and as he came quite near I noticed a nervous twitching of the lips; though, in spite of it, he tried to smile.

"Darling," he said, with an unsteady voice, but quite loud enough to reach his companions, "darling, I cannot go with you. This—this—person"—indicating one of the men—"will accompany you to the Charing Cross Hotel, where I telegraphed for rooms this morning. In an hour or two I hope to join you. You may be sure the business must be imperative that takes me from you."

"O Edgar! Business—*now?*"

"Don't make it harder for me, Léonie!" And, the sorrowful, pleading tone awed me instantly into silent acquiescence.

The two men must have heard each word, but both kept their eyes averted, and the peculiar stolidity on the countenance of the one, seemed to reflect itself on that of the other. With a silent hand-clasp, Edgar and I parted, and I was driven off in a cab as fast as the crowded state of the London streets permitted.

On reaching Charing Cross Hotel, the man whom Edgar had sent with me on the box only waited to see the luggage in and to know the number of the apartments allotted to us—I saw him enter it in his pocket-book—and then, without a word to me, he departed.

I was shown into a handsome suite of rooms on the first floor. Numerous candles lighted up the pretty sitting-room, a bright fire burned in the grate, near which was a small round dining-table, laden with fruit and flowers, and covers laid for two. The quantity of lovely flowers made the air heavy with perfume.

A little later on, emerging from the bed-room, I found a waiter removing one of the covers. He inquired if he should serve dinner then. Not until my husband came, I told him.

"Pardon, madam," he said deferentially, "but the dinner was ordered for this hour, and the person who saw to the luggage said it was the gentleman's wish he should not be waited for."

"I cannot dine alone," was my only answer, with difficulty choking back a sob; and when the man had left the room I shed tears at the forlornness of my position—a husbandless bride! In vain I inhaled the sweetness of the lovely flowers that Edgar's forethought had provided; they only seemed to add new bitterness to my heart, causing my tears to break out afresh.

Restless and feverish, I alternately paced the rooms or stood listening for the slightest sound that might herald my husband's coming. All at once my glance fell on a heap of newspapers lying on a side-table, and the sight of them recalled an incident of our journey. I would follow our fellow traveller's advice and seek distraction for my mind in reading of the murder which had so engrossed him. What I wanted was easy enough to find! It occupied a conspicuous place in the first paper I took up. The heading was in large type, as though it were the most important topic of the day. It is needless—and would be tedious—to give here the whole of the newspaper account. It will be sufficient for my purpose if I retain the style of the original, condensing it as much as possible, as follows:—

When the last train from the north reached London on Saturday night, a lady was discovered in a first-class carriage, dead. On examining the compartment there seemed abundant evidence of a struggle having taken place. A doctor—a surgeon from one of the London Hospitals, whose name, for certain reasons, I withhold—gave it as his opinion that death had been caused by strangulation. That robbery had been the incentive to the terrible crime seemed only too apparent from the fact that some sovereigns and silver were scattered on the floor, also that a broken watch-chain hung from the lady's pocket, whence the watch appeared to have been violently wrenched. There was no clue to the unfortunate lady's identity. Her appearance and dress were both minutely described. The latest accounts stated that the police believed themselves on the track of the dastardly perpetrator of the crime.

How was it that, although I read this so attentively, and can even now recall every word, it yet failed at the time to produce the effect I coveted? It was powerless to make me forget, even for a moment, my own forlorn position—a deserted bride.

When I had finished reading I looked at the timepiece. It was nearly ten o'clock. At this moment a man was ushered in by the waiter. I recognised him at once as the same who had come on the cab from the station.

The newspaper was still lying spread out before me on the table.

Resting my hands upon it, I looked at the intruder. "Do you come from Mr. Harrington?" I asked.

"I do, ma'am."

"You have brought me a message?"

"A note."

So saying, he strode forward and laid a folded slip of paper before me. A small key fell from it as I opened it. These words were scrawled in pencil:

"DEAREST,—Enclosed is key of my portmanteau. The bearer has my instructions.—E. H."

"I'm here to open the gentleman's portmanteau, ma'am; and the sooner you show it me the quicker things will get done."

"But we have not been out of England," I began, some vague old memories of Custom House duties flitting through my mind. "The portmanteau is in there," I added; for, after all, had I not proof this man was sent by Edgar?

Scarcely had I spoken when he dragged the portmanteau in from the adjoining bedroom, and commenced a most careful examination of the contents. How it chafed me to see those coarse, rough hands turning over my husband's things—things which to me, his wife, would have been sacred!

Was Edgar compelled by the business which had called him away to stay all night? This interpretation of the affair occurred to me at seeing two or three articles of dress—after undergoing a strangely close scrutiny—placed on one side. Something fell from the waistcoat-pocket as the man was folding it. He picked it up, looked at it eagerly, and there burst from him a sudden, uncontrollable cry of surprise.

"What is that?"

"Nothing," he answered, awkwardly, and thrust it into his own pocket.

"I insist on you showing me what you have got there. It belongs to my husband and not to you, I conclude. Show it instantly," I said, for I felt certain, now, this man was insolently exceeding his prerogative.

"If you insist, of course I will. But, my dear lady, I'll take upon me to say your husband would rather I did not."

"I order you."

Somewhat reluctantly, it seemed, he drew out his hand, opened it, and showed a watch—a small gold watch. On the back was a monogram in brilliants. To the swivel hung about an inch of slender broken chain. *Only* a watch—an inch of broken chain.

I saw it as it lay there in his open palm. I close my eyes and see it now, and feel again the cruel pang that shot through my heart as the story of the murder I had just read, suddenly stood out before me like a living picture painted in flames of fire.

From the pretty jewelled toy I looked into the face of the man. My eyes were opened then, and I knew him to be a policeman. For the moment I was myself a murderess in thought, wishing I could kill him where he stood.

"And he—Mr. Harrington—my husband—is accused of——?" I gasped: then paused.

"Of murder. It's an ugly word, but you would have it, ma'am. The gentleman said as how you knew nothing, and needn't know till morning."

"But he is innocent!" I cried, in agony. "He could not do this thing—never—never!"

"Oh! If you can prove an alibi, he's safe enough," returned the man, in tones that expressed more than doubt.

Alas! I had not seen Edgar from parting with him on Saturday afternoon until that—Monday—morning. What was there I could do or say to help him?

"But where is he? Surely they will accept—bail?"

"Bail? evidence against him far too strong for that," he answered, looking with exultant satisfaction at the bundle of clothes he held in his arms. "Accused's at the—Police station, where he'll stay right enough till morning. Can't waste no more time here. Good night, ma'am."

And carrying with him the "evidence," he left me alone in my misery.

It was no mere dream, no nightmare, from which I should presently awake and smile as at terrors past. It was a most fearful reality this charge against my husband. I sank upon the floor, overwhelmed for a moment by the horror of it. The next, I sprang to my feet, seized with a sudden subtle inspiration.

Summoning the waiter, I said to him as collectedly as I could: "There is an old gentleman here, called Gooderingham—Mr. Septimus Gooderingham. I wish to see him immediately."

He assured me that among so many people no attention was paid to names of casual comers. If I knew the gentleman's "number"—

"Find me his number, and this is yours." So saying, I laid a golden bribe upon the table. The waiter was not long in earning his reward. The gentleman's number was 470; but he was out.

How should I know when he returned? Could I trust to anyone in this huge hotel to tell me? No. I would go to his room myself and wait. There was little difficulty in carrying out my project. Wrapping myself in my large warm travelling cloak and putting on my bonnet, I went up the staircase to No. 470. The key was in the door. Not the slightest idea have I how long I sat there in the cold and darkness; but at last I heard the handle turn, and Mr. Gooderingham came in.

Never shall I forget the look of unutterable dismay that overspread his cheery face, as, raising the candle he carried in his hand, he allowed the light to fall upon me. Before he could speak, I grasped

him by the arm, and looking at him steadily, said, in so calm a voice it seemed to me as though another, not I, were speaking:

"My husband has been arrested—charged with that dreadful crime you were reading of. He is innocent—I know that he is innocent. We were only married this morning. Mr. Gooderingham, something tells me that you can save him!"

It has been said that man is guided by reason—woman by impulse; but I should say woman's guide is instinct, rather than impulse, in such a case as mine. Some strange instinct—most surely it was not reason—caused me to believe this man could save Edgar. So firm was the belief that it gave me a fictitious strength, and when I had related every detail that was known to me, I asked:

"Now that you know all, what will you do?"

"But I don't know all," returned Mr. Gooderingham. "I only know one side yet, and that very imperfectly; and I say that, as far as circumstantial evidence goes, it's enough to hang your husband or any other man. But now I'll work up the other side, of course."

"To prove my husband's innocence?"

"No, young lady. To prove the *truth*."

Was I disappointed with this answer? No! My faith in Edgar's innocence was complete. To know the truth would prove it.

Mr. Gooderingham sat for some moments silent, lost in thought. Presently he asked: "By-the-by, you said there was a diamond monogram upon the watch?"

"Yes."

Again for a few seconds he looked thoughtful, as though his mind were occupied by other matters than the case in point. There was a pained, far-away look in his eyes.

"I suppose these fancy watches are pretty common now," he continued, more as though speaking his thoughts aloud than addressing himself to me. "I didn't think so once, and imagined I had chosen a present quite unique, when I presented one, such as you describe, to a lady. Poor thing, she was very proud of it then. Dear me, dear me! It is only like the other day, that she —— Were you able to make out the letters, or was it one of those undecipherable monograms that may stand for anything?" he asked, as though a new channel for thought were opened out.

"The letters were quite plain: they were M. G."

If I had suddenly accused him of the murder he could hardly have started more visibly.

"*What?*" he cried, bending forward, and grasping spasmodically both arms of his chair. "Not M. G. in Roman letters, on a dark blue ground? Don't tell me that. Don't! Don't!"

"But it is the truth, Mr. Gooderingham. You have described the watch exactly. Those two letters stood out quite clearly on a ground of dark blue enamel. But you have discovered a clue! Tell me—for pity's sake tell me ——"

He jumped up, seized his hat, and was rushing from the room. Vainly I sought to bar his passage.

"Useless to detain me. I can't explain. In the morning I will tell you all I know. It may be all a mistake, but—dear! dear! it's coming perilously near home."

With these enigmatical words, he left me and hurried down the stairs. Then slowly and sadly I sought my room, where, sitting down beside the window, I kept my lonely vigil. When midnight struck, I knew my wedding-day was ended.

As the grey dawn brightened, the fog and smoke to some extent dispersed, and the November sun, like a great red ball of fire, rose higher and higher in the heavens. Was it an augury that my darkest hour was past?

Some time after noon, a commissionaire brought me a tiny, twisted note. It contained these words, written in pencil, hurriedly, in Edgar's hand. "*All is well. In an hour, or less, I shall be with you.*" But the reaction was too much. I flung myself upon the bed and sobbed aloud.

A short half hour more, and I was in Edgar's arms, laughing and crying alternately at the strange joy of it, and, in my newly found happiness forgetting to inquire, and scarce caring to know, how it had come about. But after a little time I knew, and, as briefly as possible, I will relate it here.

When Edgar reached N——, after parting with me on Saturday afternoon, he found a telegram awaiting him from the firm of engineers who had given him the Indian appointment. It stated that the head of the firm was obliged, unexpectedly, to start for Paris next day, and desired Edgar, if possible, to meet him in London first, to receive his final instructions. There was just time to save the four o'clock express to town, and Edgar left by it, judging it best not to inform me of his sudden and unexpected departure. He travelled alone from York to Peterborough.

At the last named station, when, after a few minutes' delay, the train was on the point of starting, a young lady, apparently in a state of considerable excitement, ran along the platform, and, pushing past the guard who was about to close the door, jumped into the carriage, beside my husband. They had proceeded some distance, before she had sufficiently recovered breath to speak, but at last, in gasps, she made him understand she had no ticket, and no money; that she had run away from some great danger, and if he would have pity on her and furnish her with sufficient funds to pursue her journey, she would give him the address of her uncle by whom he would be repaid. Her strange, excited manner alarmed my husband. Hoping to calm her he handed her his purse, requesting her to take what money she required. He saw her help herself to gold and silver. Then, with the money and purse still in her hand, she took out her watch and tried apparently to detach it from the chain. Too impatient to effect this

properly, she tore it off by sheer force, breaking at the same time the slender, plain chain of Indian gold to which it was fastened. Then, placing the watch, together with the purse, in Edgar's hand, she said:

"Take that to Uncle Septimus; he will recognise it and will repay you. I particularly want him to have the watch. His address ——"

She never spoke again, but, with a stifled cry, fell forward on the floor of the carriage, struggling and writhing in mortal agony. Edgar, guessing this to be either some paroxysm of madness or some sort of fit, grappled with her with all his might, but his utmost natural strength was slight compared with that of frenzy. How long the dreadful struggle lasted, he could not guess. In vain he attempted to signal to the guard to stop the train; his hands were too closely occupied in holding the unfortunate girl down upon the floor. At last she lay quite still, but when thus enabled to relax his hold, life had fled. He raised her, placed her on the seat, and then the awkwardness of his own position occurred to him for the first time.

The fact of a lady being found dead in the train would necessitate an inquiry, and he, Edgar, as the only person cognisant of the circumstances of her death would be required to attend such inquiry. This would inevitably cause delay, and delay to Edgar at this particular juncture of his life meant certain ruin to all his prospects, the one stipulation regarding his Indian appointment being that he must start on Wednesday without fail. This last thought decided him. He determined that, voluntarily, he would say nothing of the terrible tragedy he had witnessed. He entirely forgot the watch which, in his haste to render assistance to the poor girl, he had thrust hurriedly into his pocket. He forgot the money that had fallen to the ground when she was first seized; but with a sad feeling at his heart, and a conscience that all the time upbraided him sorely, he removed, as far as he was able, the traces of the encounter from his clothes and person. The instant the train reached King's Cross, at 10.40, he gave up his ticket, and was out of the station probably before many of the passengers had even left their carriages.

He next went into a restaurant, and there the idea occurred to him that the removal of his moustache might aid in frustrating any attempt to identify him as the travelling companion of the unfortunate girl. The interview with his employer was accomplished satisfactorily, and he left London again for the North by the 1.42 train on Sunday morning.

Having made the return journey without recognition, he hoped all would now be well. It was not until he saw the newspaper account of the affair on his way to Leascar on Monday morning, that he realised the horror of the situation, and then, when too late, deeply regretted the part he had taken. There appeared nothing for it now but to let events take their natural course. There was still the chance he might be able to leave England without discovery. He would risk that chance; and, if fate favoured him, he would write a detailed

account of the whole sad story and send it to the newspapers. Fate did not favour him. He was seen and recognised at Peterborough and a telegram to Scotland Yard caused two detectives in plain clothes to be in waiting at King's Cross.

When told of the charge laid against him, Edgar contented himself with simply asserting his innocence, and professed his entire readiness to go to —— Police station and explain everything before the proper authorities. Now for the part Mr. Gooderingham played in the affair. Late as it was when he left me, he managed to gain access to the room where the body of the poor girl lay, and at once identified it as that of his niece and only living relation. She had been subject to epileptic fits since childhood, and owing to their increased severity had been placed by her uncle, within the last few months, under the care of a doctor in Huntingdonshire, who gave particular attention to such cases. During his temporary absence, and by means which need not be detailed here, she managed to escape from the custody of those who had charge of her.

"And now," said Edgar when he had told me this, "thanks solely, I believe, to the wonderful chance that threw Mr. Septimus Gooderingham across our path, my character is not only completely cleared from the horrible charge, but, what I had scarcely dared to hope, we can sail for India on Wednesday without let or hindrance."

"But does Mr. Gooderingham blame you, Edgar, for—for ——?" I inquired anxiously, though I could not conclude the sentence.

"He seemed fully to understand my reasons for acting as I did," answered my husband, "and was even kind enough to say he thought that under such very exceptional circumstances many a man would have done the same. It was an error in judgment. Mr. Gooderingham has promised to see us off on Wednesday to wish us Godspeed."

Shortly after out arrival in India I received a letter from my old friend Dr. Grey. Commenting on Edgar's very narrow escape of being tried for murder, he added this most characteristic remark :

"It is my firm conviction—and I have not studied humanity more than half a century for nothing—that no man would have placed himself by his own act in such a predicament as Harrington did, if he had had a head for *whist*."

Ah, well ! we are very happy now. But I may safely say that never in all our lives to come shall we commemorate with anything approaching rejoicing, the anniversary of our terrible wedding-day.

E. M. Davy.

THE CRUISE OF THE RESERVE SQUADRON.

By Charles W. Wood,

Author of "Through Holland," "In the Black Forest," etc.

WE left Arosa Bay not without regret. The day at Santiago would long dwell in the memory of those who had visited the Pilgrim City. There was something pleasant, even in the very sleepiness of Carril, and though it might be nothing but the change from sea to land, the result was the same. It was hard also to abandon the bright flowers, human and natural, discovered only at the last moment in that little earthly paradise bordering its calm waters.

After we had expended our quarter's ammunition outside the Bay, we rejoined the Squadron at 6.o. p.m., and the seven vessels steamed onward for Gibraltar. We should now be some days without touching land, yet most of the time within sight of the coast of Spain or Portugal. Cruel was it to pass the entrance to Lisbon unvisited, where wonders greater than those of Arosa waited to be known; but, as there was no help for it, they must be left to the imagination. At least we were a large and merry company on board, though grave and solemn in the intervals of severe study; and if, at sea, one day was very much like another, amongst ourselves there was no monotony.

Saturday found us steaming along the Spanish coast, and near enough to enjoy it to some extent. We were now in the loveliest climate imaginable. The purest air, most serene of skies, bluest of water; so blue, so transparent, so real, it seemed that we had only to gather up the colour and make it our own. It is impossible to describe the charm of this vast expanse of intensely blue skies and seas; even at the moment of experience, you cannot put into words the strange, unreal dream into which you are plunged, making life for the time being nothing less than a paradise. The hours fly too quickly; the glass of time runs out in golden sands; how come back ever to the cold and prosy world you have left behind?

Chess, backgammon, whist at night, and learned discussions varied the lively hours. Pyramid would now and then read out a page of Sanskrit, which to him (influenced by the pressed lily) was now the most interesting study in the world. And the amiable M.B., who was reading up Theology against his return to England, for a Debating Society of which he was a distinguished member, would sometimes by way of digestive—in the interval between the end of dinner and the beginning of whist—give us a chapter from Butler

or Paley, before retiring to his cabin to enjoy a quiet half hour with a book he especially delighted in—no less a volume than Hervey's "Meditations among the Tombs."

No one would listen to Pyramid's Sanskrit or the M.B.'s post prandial chapters more attentively than Lieutenant Van Stoker, a young officer of far-off Dutch extraction, to whom I had taken a great liking. I fancy it was mutual. By nature dark, muscular and good-looking, he grew pale and thin, and altogether ethereal and interesting, as the days "wore their slow lengths away." There came over him a pensive melancholy, a dreaminess, a far-off look in his eyes, inexpressibly romantic to behold, but unfathomably sad. It puzzled me greatly. He would sit and sigh by the hour, apparently unconscious of anyone's presence, poring over the leaves of a romance, held more often than not, as I perceived, upside down. When the M.B. was reading and doing his utmost to improve our minds, Van Stoker would fix his grave, large, earnest eyes upon him with a fixed intent stare, as if through all that profound Analogy and Philosophy, and beyond the doctor, he saw, as in a celestial vision, some far-off object of his adoration.

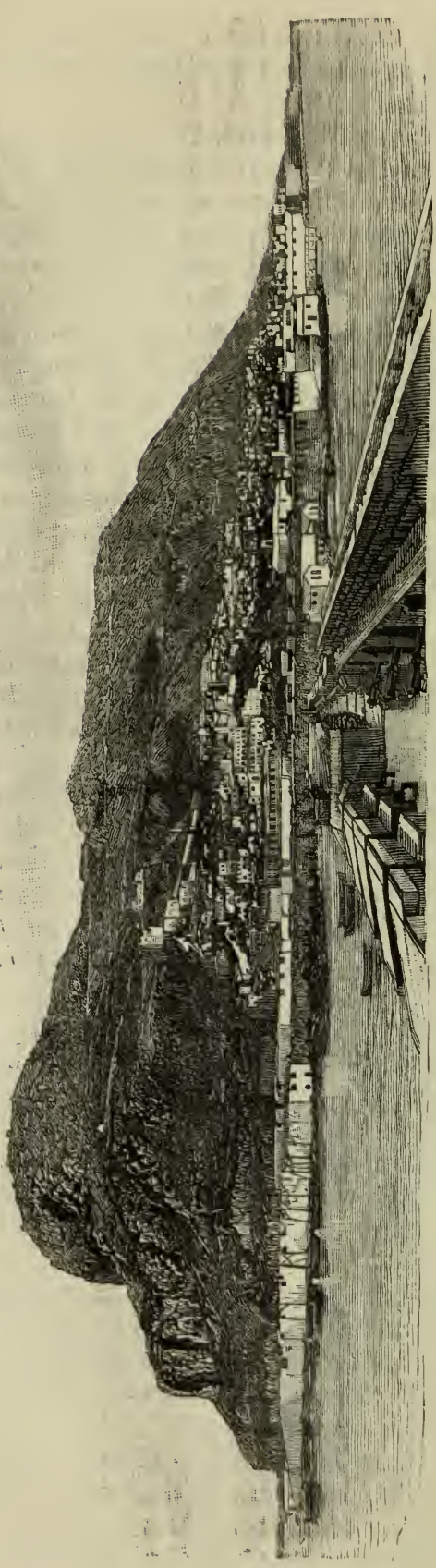
And such indeed it proved. One day, some of us were about to land. (I am slightly forestalling here, for we were then at Gibraltar.) The first horn had sounded, announcing that the shore boat would be ready in a few minutes. This horn, par parenthèse, would send me into convulsions, until I grew familiar with it, so extraordinary was its sound; for all the world like a goat in a rage, giving a short sharp bark—if goats can in any way be said to bark. This first horn had sounded to announce the boat—just as our first gong sounds on shore for dinner—when Van Stoker, more pallid and pensive than ever, took me privately aside and asked me if I would post a few letters for him.

"I don't care to ask the others," he explained, "they would be so full of chaff, but *you* are different." Much affected by this mark of confidence and discrimination, I promised profound secrecy and sympathy.

I followed him into his cabin, where I found sympathy possible, but secrecy less easy. He had spent all his leisure time, even robbing himself of sleep, to write volumes and volumes of letters, all going to one address.

"Van Stoker," I said, with gentle reproach, "have we here the cause of your sighs and your wasting away? Oh, why did you not take me sooner into your confidence? Why couldn't you have relieved my mind by a word? I have had fears of consumption—of atrophe—of I know not *what* concerning you."

In a frenzy of emotion he threw his arms round me. "My dear fellow," he cried, "I am the happiest man in the world—at least I *should* be if I were only going to that address instead of these letters. Only fancy what their emotions will be when—No, no!



GIBRALTAR. GENERAL VIEW.

I mean what *mine* would be if—No! no! it's not that, either. I mean—what *do* I mean?"

"There, there, my dear Van," I cried, seriously alarmed for his mind, and gently disengaged myself from his bear-like embrace.—I firmly believe he fancied he had suddenly clasped some celestial divinity in his arms. —"Calm yourself, my dear fellow. This emotion, the M.B. would tell you, plays havoc with the left ventricle of the heart. You'll fall ill of a fever, and in your state it would inevitably fly to the brain. Only think what your ravings would be!"

He calmed at once. "No, no," he cried. "You little guess my powers of self-control. I shall be right enough when once the corner's turned and we are homeward bound. Think what it is to feel that every hour takes you further from the goal where you would be!"

He certainly did grow somewhat less shadowy as the days went on. I shall never forget his landing subsequently at Portsmouth, when he left the *Defence* for good and all. He was beside himself with delight. Several of us had landed with him, and on coming off again at night, he escorted us to the boat. Our dear

Commander dropt his umbrella into the water, and in a transport of enthusiasm towards all men in general and the Commander in particular, Van plunged in and came out with it between his teeth, for all the world like a big, brave Newfoundland. Only last September that ever was (again we are dating forward) when up in town for a day or two, who should I meet in Piccadilly, looking radiant and twice the man he had been at Gib., but Van Stoker.

"My dear fellow," he cried, "congratulate me ten thousand million times. You know all about it?"

"I do," I replied. "I saw it in to-day's *Times*. Last week at St. George's, Hanover Square. Was that friendship, Van? Was it gratitude? Was it a fitting return for keeping your secret and stuffing myself out like Punch with your love letters?"

"Well, but," he responded, "I should have let you know, and asked you to come and support me; your absence was the one only drawback"—(of course I pretended to swallow this, and bowed in acknowledgment)—"but I heard from Broadley that you were across the water. Over in Lapland or Siberia, or somewhere."

"France," I mildly corrected. "So I was: and came back last Monday. But if you had only let me know in time, I would have taken a special boat and train rather than fail you. Van," I continued, "do you remember jumping into the water that last night, after the Commander's umbrella?"

"No, no," he returned, "you don't mean that! But I was so wild with delight at getting back to old England that I might have done a thousand mad things and been none the wiser. That accounts for the fearful cold I had the next day; couldn't speak when I woke up; vowed at the hotel they had put me into damp sheets; kicked up the very deuce of a row! As to the Commander—what a good fellow he was! I'd jump into the water after a dozen umbrellas for him, even if I caught a dozen colds!"

And then we parted; and he went his way; and I went mine; and I could see that he trod upon air, and was in Paradise.

But to go back to our cruise and the letters that we left lying in Van Stoker's cabin.

"I can indeed sympathise with you," I said; "but how conceal them? You've enough here to supply the Fleet."

It was a terrible dilemma. "Would my cocked hat case do?" he suggested, after a pause.

"Not big enough," I answered. "Wouldn't hold half of them." The dear fellow was too far gone to have any judgment left, or reason either. "You'll have to stuff them into a pillow case, and send them on shore by your servant—I'll see that they're posted. It will only look like ——"

"Hold!" he cried, putting his hands to his ears. "Profanation! I couldn't bear the comparison. Remember their destination. Remember what they have cost me!"

Poor fellow! He was very far gone indeed. Well, after all, it must be a lovely state to be in; something, I should say, quite different from all other of life's experiences. Yet good for the patient that the violence of the disease wears off—or it would inevitably prove fatal.

Finally the letters were disposed of. Some in pockets; some in hat; some in waistcoat; some in the legs of my Wellington boots. Altogether, I looked, as I have said, very much like the figure of Punch. Van Stoker saw me take my seat in the cutter in a paroxysm of fear and trembling. "Be careful," he whispered, in tremulous tones, leaning over the gangway. No need of the caution: I *had* to be careful.

"Why, what's up?" said de Keyser, who had already taken his seat. He went in every morning for a dose of Anti-fat, did de Keyser, and counteracted its effect by transgressing every night at dinner in the most unblushing manner. I could see him at the other end of the table going in regularly for bread and potatoes and beer, and everything that was forbidden fruit to him. "What's the matter?" he repeated. "You weigh down your side of the boat more than I do mine. Let me prescribe a dose of Anti-fat. What on earth is it?"

"An affection of the heart," I gravely replied, "but the worst symptoms will shortly disappear." I did not see that I was called upon to explain that it was an affection of Van Stoker's heart and not mine. You cannot be responsible for wrong impressions that other people take up.

We landed, and I staggered up to the post office and discharged my trust. Nine-and-forty letters, if you'll believe me, written on foolscap paper (I do not indeed mean the word for a jeu-de-mot), each envelope containing many sheets. Quite a crowd collected round me as I unpacked, and shrank back to a mere nothing, and so to say, posted myself; until I grew red and uncomfortable and hot and cold. But I would have done the same all over again the next day and every day for my dear Van Stoker. Friendship must be absolutely self-sacrificing, or it is nothing.

To return to the Squadron, on the broad seas between Arosa Bay and Gibraltar.

All Saturday we were steaming in deep blue waters along the coast. The sun ran its course through a dazzling sky, flooding earth and sea with a light divine; sinking to the horizon in a blaze of glory visible nowhere but on the ocean. The sky deepened and darkened, the stars came out, the moon, now seven days old, grew more and more luminous, as she too sank westward. It was after dinner. I was pacing the deck, I remember, with my friend above all others on board, Broadley. It was the interval before whist; not devoted to the M.B.'s chapter to-night, who was just then absorbed in a treatise eventually to be read before the Royal College of Surgeons, to prove

in the most incontrovertible manner the fallacy of the Darwinian Theory. When it has been read (he sends me word that he is drawing to a conclusion) it will be published to the world; and I shall be much surprised—we all shall be much surprised—the M.B. will be much surprised himself, though he is far too modest to say so—if it does not take the world by storm and found a new school of thought.

Broadley and I, then, were pacing the deck, talking over our last year's cruises in the Channel. I was reminding him of how an acquaintance of ours used to walk up and down a certain street in Plymouth, where dwelt a certain unknown young lady, who had reduced him almost to Van Stoker's present condition: how he used to bribe an organ-grinder and a monkey to go and play in front of the windows, so that he might have an excuse for standing and staring, not at the monkey but at the fair face above: how the fair one's Parent (a cross-grained old catamaran of a retired general in the British Army) at last smelt a rat, rushed out with an implement of war spiked at the end, and flew into such a towering passion that the organ grinder, panic-stricken and half-paralysed with terror, stopped short in the middle of "Sally come up," and decamped as if the very deuce had been after him; dragging the unfortunate monkey, who grinned and chattered and protested in vain against having his limbs torn asunder and his brains dashed out.

Broadley was just going to declare our mutual friend's innocence and lay all blame at *my* door—like a true son of Adam (whatever we are *not* descended from, we certainly are descended from Adam), when up came Van Stoker again, the embodiment of pale, pensive, melancholy youth. You should have heard his voice in those days—quite a shrill treble when he was ordering the men about on the bridge.

"Do you see that moon?" he said, sighing deeply, as he took my arm and brought us to a standstill.

"Distinctly," I answered. "She is in her first quarter to-night and promises fine weather."

"Barbarous!" I heard him mutter. "No soul, no romance! Lovely moon," he continued, apostrophising the orb—and what there was of her really was lovely. "Oh, lovely moon!—Do you think she is gazing at it at this moment?"

"Van!" I cried, "what do you mean? What are you talking about? Who is *she?*" He looked away for a moment (for it was before the episode of the letters, you must remember, and he had not yet taken me into his confidence).

"Oh, nothing," he returned, his pale face now red as a rose. "Only—only—the young lady who was shut up in a tower for throwing that lily at Pyramid. Do you think she cared *very* much for Pyramid—enough to break her heart, and pine away, and die?" And without waiting for an answer, he suddenly let go my arm, and disappeared like a flash down the companion ladder.

"What *is* the matter with him?" I said, turning to Broadley. "He changes day by day. Do you think it can be —?" And I touched my forehead with my finger.

"No," returned Broadley; "I put it down to over-study. I fancy he means to go in for gunnery, and is working up for it. His light is often burning when he ought to be asleep, getting rest to prepare him for his next watch. I think he'll be all right by-and-by. Come down, now, for a rubber."

And down we went.

The next day, Sunday, was finer than ever, the climate tropical, the perfectly calm sea a yet deeper blue. Mother Carey's chickens flew about us, little brown and white birds for ever on the wing; porpoises splashed around; once or twice we noticed the spouting of a whale—an infrequent visitor in these waters; distant fishing-boats here and there, with their curious rig and quaint sails, looked like huge flying monsters, white and weird upon the horizon.

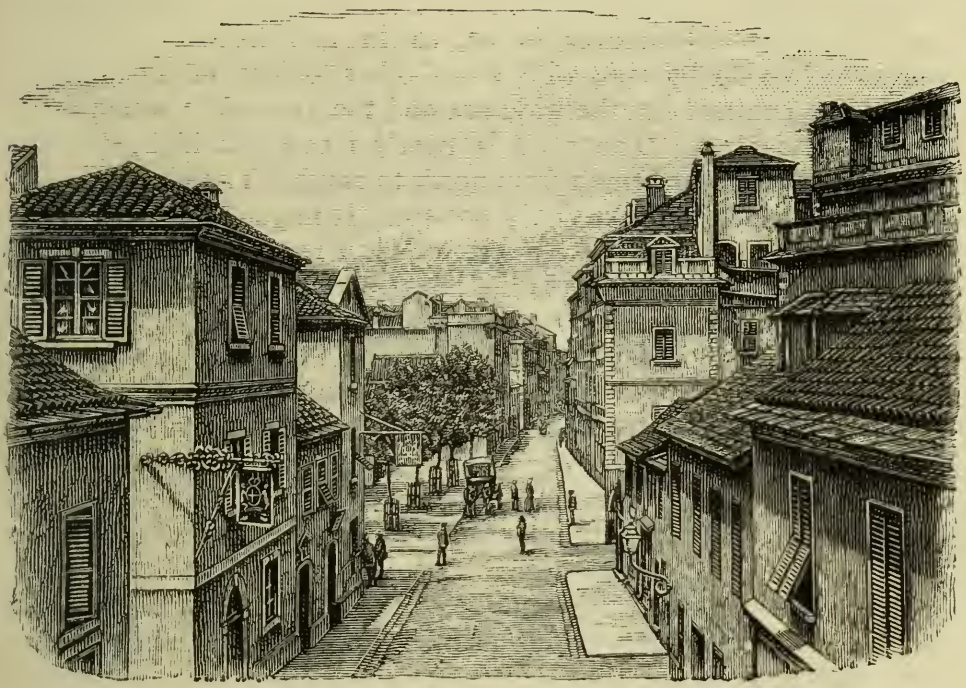
To-day we had Service on the upper deck, the awning shielding us from the glare of the sun. How enjoyable it all was! How full of delicious repose, of glowing sunshine, of balmy air, of pleasant companionship! The men brought up their benches, which stretched downwards in many rows: blue-jackets one side, marines the other. From the mast-head of the seven vessels the church pendant (a white flag carrying a red cross) was flying, and all possible work was suspended.

The men, quiet and attentive, seemed to join heartily in the service, and there was something solemn in its very simplicity. The majesty of the subject brought its own dignity. We were surrounded by the grandest objects in creation—the boundless sea and sky. Quietly we steamed through the wide waters. A soft breeze, soothing and delicious, crept under the awning. There, to our left, stretched the coast in long-drawn undulations. Lovely, sleepy mountains wrapped in a golden haze retreated inwards. Familiar hymns ascended towards the far-off skies, the open space modulating the untrained voices. Then the preacher's voice alone broke the stillness as he gave out his text: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish," and in a short, earnest sermon, applied the words to his hearers, enforcing his lessons with board-ship-life illustrations well adapted to the sailors.

The whole of that Sunday was a particularly pleasant day. We could trace the land and follow the undulations, but were hardly near enough to make out distinct objects without the help of glasses. It was to-day that we passed Lisbon and the mouth of the Tagus, and longed to steam up the river. Here and there the rocky coast stood out high and bold, the long stretches of white sand beneath inviting to lounges and lazy baskings in the sunshine. All day the strangely-rigged little vessels were hovering about the seas, looking like birds of prey watching for a victim. Steamers passed us occa-

sionally, and dipped, and we dipped in answer. Now we passed a grand castle upon a lofty hill, the town and university of Cintra. Then the coast grew barren and rocky, and derived its interest chiefly from the outlines that cut the sky so sharply. At four o'clock we passed Espichel Point, and far off sleepy mountains, their summits wreathed in vapour. And then we lost sight of land.

Monday was much as the preceding day, except that for the greater part of it we were surrounded by sea and sky, and saw no trace of land. The day passed on to night, the stars came out in the dark sky, and the moon threw a long jewelled trail of light upon the dark waters. There was silence in the fleet; only the lights to tell that



MAIN STREET, GIBRALTAR.

the seven vessels were true to their stations, keeping exactly the same position towards each other as in the broad daylight hours. Here and there a distant gleam flashed out, the light, as a rule, of some trading steamer passing up the coast, and probably on her way to England. But the air was still, and no sound disturbed the mysterious silence of space.

So Tuesday came to us. We entered the Straits of Gibraltar, and land was seen on both sides. Far ahead, the great rock, that for so many centuries was a source of contention between nations, became visible, growing gradually more huge and more distinct: a long, dark mass, standing out in bold, clear-cut outlines against a background of blue sky. A white cloud hovered over its summit; a frequent occurrence, when, perhaps, all the rest of the sky is clear and unbroken. It rather added to its picturesque appearance

—if, indeed, there was anything approaching the picturesque about the rock itself. At length we rounded into the Harbour, or Bay, of Gibraltar, got into position, waited our signal from the Flag Ship, and all, at the same moment, let go the anchor. Here we were to remain eight or nine days: time enough to see all Gibraltar over and over again, and make excursions into the interior "if so disposed."

From our present vantage ground (if water can be called ground) we saw before us a huge mass of rock towering upwards to the sky, of great height and considerable width. But I confess to, at first, a slight feeling of disappointment. I had pictured Gibraltar as more wild and romantic, still more gigantic than it really is. Its reputation had preceded it, and when that is the case imagination generally outruns reality. Moreover, when, as in this instance, it is not immediately side by side with some other object of comparison: nothing in contrast but the wide sea and the great sky: much of the actual size is lost. The rock is nearly 1,500 feet high, six miles round, three miles in length from north to south. The circumference, from our present point, we could not see. It might have been merely a thin, upright sandwich of a rock, with just room on the summit for the sole of one's foot. This is the impression conveyed in looking at it from the town side; but on rounding Europa Point, another long stretch of almost perpendicular rock opens up, forming, as it were, the second side of a triangle, and looking terrific in its gigantic, wall-like, precipitous aspect. A little time ago two sailor lads started to walk round the rock. They managed it very well until they reached this part, when one, frightened, wisely turned back; the other went on, and his body, dashed to pieces, was found on the sands the next day.

To-day the rock looked barren and burnt up. Weeks of blazing sun and dry weather had done their work. To the left stretched the town in a long line, houses and streets on the level, and reaching some distance up the slope. A very steep slope, as we found by after experience when struggling in broad sunshine towards the flag-staff. To the right was the Alameda—the Promenade or Public Gardens, planted with shady trees and enlivened with gorgeous flowers. Here the rank and fashion of Gibraltar, English and Spanish, congregate of an evening, when the sun goes down and a breeze springs up, and a band plays its best, and the sounds float out to sea over the darkling water.

The trees and shrubs and flowers about the lower part of the rock throw into greater contrast the barrenness of the height above. And this enormous surface of stone reflected a heat that seemed terrific. How stand it for eight or nine days? Of late we had had nothing before us but broad sea and open sky and far-off horizon; when no other wind was stirring, the breeze begotten of our progress cooled the ardour of our studious and fevered brains. To be suddenly confronted by this upright frying-pan, in a dead calm, threatened in the first flush of arrival, to become a calamity. The Commander sighed

heavily as he took in the dimensions of the rock, multiplied them by the rays of the sun, and produced the result as the sum total of the sufferings in store for us. "It will be awful," he said, with another sigh. "Not one of us can possibly survive to tell the tale."

"What shall we call it?" I asked pathetically, much affected by his prophecy.

"Tartarus," he suggested.

"A good thought. The Gloomy Portals. And we will take for our motto, 'All ye who enter in, leave hope behind.'"

"Alas! what Strait are we come to?" groaned Broadley—we were all three on the bridge—a fine tremor in his voice.

But the pun was too much for our digestion. He was evidently laughing in his sleeve; and, our dignity ruffled, we retired to the Commander's cabin and drowned dull care in a game of backgammon.

But the Commander's suggestion was too good to be lost, and "Tartarus" it remained.

We were almost surrounded by land, for the opposite mountains, helping to form the Straits, though distant enough, seemed to close in and join hands with the mainland of Spain. Yet farther away stretched the long, low coast of Morocco; the sea washing the feet of ancient Tangiers, that contests with Damascus the privilege of being the oldest city in the world. We shall have something to say about Damascus by-and-by, but its turn has not yet come. Round by Europa Point stretched the deep blue waters of the Mediterranean, invisible from our present station.

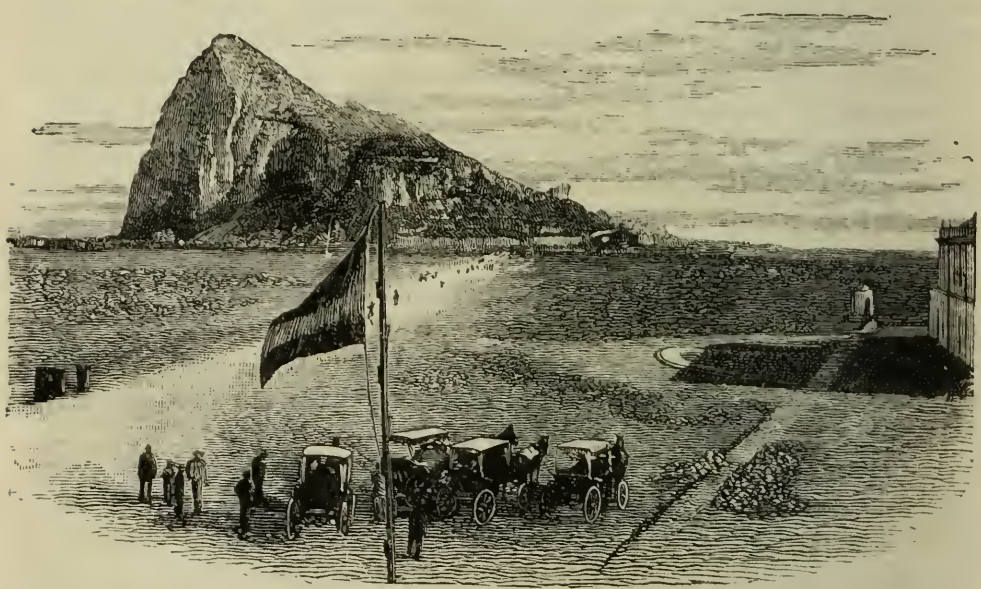
Gibraltar, as the world knows, forms a part of Andalusia; and Andalusia is the favoured portion of Spain; the Andalusians are most famed for their beauty and grace. The climate is delicious, though its softness begets a dreamy indolence in its people. Yet literature and art have flourished there, and great painters have been born to it.

Gibraltar has played its part in the world's history, has fallen into many hands, given rise to wars, and cost multitudes of lives. This immense mountain of stone, with no beauty about it and no resources —nothing but the fact of its being a rock of defence (and offence) guarding the entrance to the Mediterranean—has been the coveted of many nations, the possession of a few. It is—as far as anything can be in these days—impregnable, and could scarcely be taken otherwise than by stratagem. To this it has once or twice nearly fallen a victim. It was finally taken by Sir George Rooke in 1704, with a loss of about sixty killed and two hundred wounded, to the grief and mortification of the Spaniards, who, in the possession of the rock, had expended a multitude of lives and millions of money.

Before the invasion of the Saracens, Gibraltar was known to the Phœnicians as Alube; to the Greeks as Calpe. Its present name is a corruption of Gib-el-Tor, the Tower-Mountain. The outline has been compared—not inaptly—to that of a crouching lion: a simile

very much àpropos to a possession of Great Britain. The sandy isthmus connecting Gibraltar with the mainland of Spain is called Neutral Ground: a long, flat uninteresting reach of about two-hundred acres, scarcely above sea-level.

The rock is composed of a hard, grey, stratified marble, not indicated on the surface. Very little is known of the history of Gibraltar until the eighth Century, when it fell into the hands of Tarif, the Saracen chief. It remained in possession of the Moors until the fourteenth century, when in the reign of Ferdinand the Fourth, King of Castile, it was retaken by Perez de Guzman. Twenty years after, it again fell into the hands of the Saracens; and so it went on, suffering chances and changes until, in the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella, in



NEUTRAL GROUND.

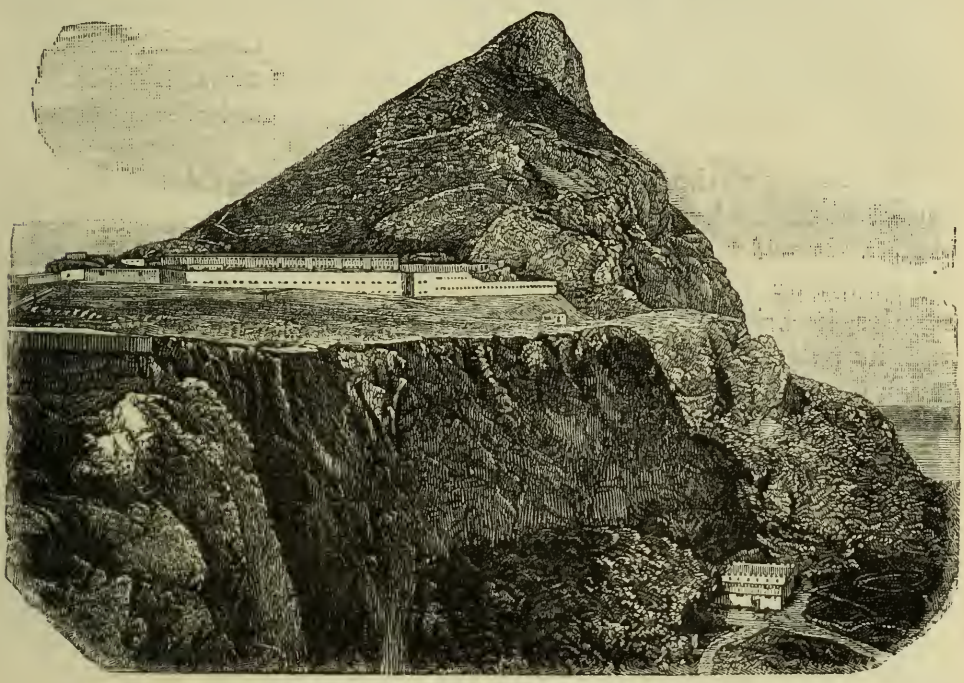
1502, it was annexed to Spain. Finally, in 1704, it fell into the hands of the English.

There is something unusually interesting about Gibraltar. Its position is singular, its appearance imposing; its early history gives it dignity, its vicissitudes and its victims lend it pathos. From its summit 1500 feet above the sea, which lies stretched so far below that on a calm day it looks like a vast blue lake, you gaze, twenty miles away, upon the shores of Africa, scene of the greatest wonders of the world, theatre of the most momentous events of temporal and eternal welfare to mankind; the land of sacred no less than of profane history. Gazing, you long for wings to transport you over those blue waters to the wonderful mountain of Abyla, the counterpart, as it were, of Gibraltar: the two forming the Pillars of Hercules of the ancients. Pillars no Samson could move.

Beneath our feet is the mysterious cave, of depths unfathomable, and said to communicate with Africa by a submarine passage. A thrilling

scene, this, for an Arabian Nights' story. One bold adventurer was lowered five hundred feet by ropes, and returned to tell the tale. And though it may be all tradition and fable, and probably is, yet imagination loves to dwell upon the possibility of the fact of that dark, mysterious tunnel, untrodden for ages by the foot of man : the weirdness of this sea-girt rock, gigantic, frowning and desolate, takes possession of the mind and colours all surrounding earth, sea and sky with an Oriental atmosphere of marvel and of mysticism.

Who can tell what lurks in that submarine world ? The remains of an army it may be : rows of skeletons that would stare us in the face and wake up and put on flesh and life again at the sound of a



GIBRALTAR FROM THE SOUTH.

footstep—like the multitude in the Valley of Dry Bones at the bidding of Ezekiel. Treasures may be there; the gems of the East, the wealth of a Solomon ; a collection richer than that of the Valley of Diamonds; waiting but the hand to pluck them, the daring to penetrate their dread abode.

Or perhaps it has become the prison house of an enchanted princess, for centuries waiting freedom from her spell by one who shall enter this living tomb, and, clasping her in his arms, restore her to animation. She shall be the most beautiful on earth, wealthiest, purest, best; the long-lost heiress to a kingdom more splendid than Spain, more fertile than Egypt; reign in consort with her deliverer, and confer upon him her own gift of perpetual youth.

A thousand-and-one tales of happiness and marvel might be imagined ; but a return to prosy life with its East Winds and its Shadows—the shock of transition is too great. If we could live out our dreams

and never rouse to realities, we might go on weaving romances for ever; but the Exodus from our self-made Paradise, our Elysian Fields, to the parched and sandy deserts of Disappointment and Disillusion, is an inquisitional experience far more wounding to the soul than ever was the ancient rack to the nerves and body of its victim.

It was this rock of Gibraltar: this mixture of romance and reality, palpable fact and eastern fable, taking us back to the early ages of the world and bringing us down to the present in a succession of dramas: before which the fleet was now anchored. We must make the best of it.

So thought some of us as we landed next morning on a visit of inspection. Broadley and I determined, in spite of the heat, to reach the flagstaff and highest point of the mountain. It was an undertaking, no doubt, but success, like virtue, is its own reward. We have both had the recompense of virtue all our lives—that of success more fitfully.

On landing at the Ragged Staff, we passed over the drawbridge and up the citadel, where a sentry in the blazing sun was trying in vain to shelter himself behind the shadow of his musket. The sunk garden on each side the bridge was quite tropical and picturesque with its myrtles, its brilliant fuchsias and geraniums, its orange-trees, its aloes and its palms. We soon found ourselves within the town. Here so much English was spoken; the names of the streets were so truly British, and the names over many of the shops; the houses, many of them, were so familiar in look and arrangement, that it was difficult to fancy ourselves on anything but English soil. And in point of possession it was nothing less; but it was Spanish born, and the atmosphere should have breathed us a romance of Andalusian orange groves, and fragrant myrtles, and fair Andalusian beauties serenaded by gay cavaliers. There was nothing of the kind—but we had it later on to perfection, in the witching precincts of the Alhambra.

Gibraltar has one long principal street; there is so much of level at the foot of the rock as to admit of this; and a few short side streets that run at right angles towards the sea. To the right of the chief thoroughfare the houses are built on the slope; streets, a square, and various public buildings; an excellent library and reading-room. Many of the houses are reached by a series of steps; Jacob's ladders that require an immense amount of cultivating before you grow friendly and familiar with them. Jacob's ladders: but they would certainly never take you to heaven in a proper frame of mind.

In the chief street the scene was sufficiently lively. The sun was already high, and there was no shade, right or left; an effect brilliant but provoking. Men were going about with fans; not the regulation folding arrangement, used with so much grace and effect by the Spanish women, but the Japanese invention which does not fold. (Par parenthèse: how few English women know how to handle a fan; a Spanish woman never irritates you with hers; its motion in

her hands, on the contrary, is rather soothing: you hear no sound. But an Englishwoman is often not only irritating with her fan, she is unendurable. You are at the opera, let us say, or at a concert: a fan on each side of you, perhaps one in front and another behind you: all rattling, and waving, and creaking like the sails of a windmill, until you are driven wild, and are ready to wish the fair owners at the very antipodes.) The shutters were closed against the heat of the sun, which gave the town, in broad daylight, a sleepy, midnight sort of appearance; a universal mourning aspect: and those behind the shutters no doubt had the best of it.

We strolled into the Roman Catholic cathedral, where a small service was going on; a priest in silver and gold stood before the altar, and one or two little acolytes flitted to and fro. But what struck one more than all was the posture of the Spanish women, kneeling about the church. There was something so wonderfully graceful in them; in their drooping mantillas, the folds of their gowns, the very disposal of their hands. And what made it more telling was the apparently unstudied charm of their attitudes. They are born graceful, not made so. Light and trifling, frivolous and coquettish they may be, but nature has gifted them with the attraction of manner and appearance, and they make the most of it. Above all, they know how to walk, and it has well been remarked that the Spanish are the only women in the world who possess this enviable accomplishment.

It was chiefly when looking in at the bazaars that we felt ourselves at least within hail of an Eastern atmosphere. All sorts and descriptions of Oriental wonders were here displayed; from Turkish lanterns and gold-wrought slippers in purple velvet, to inlaid daggers and brass trays from Tetuan with marvellous Moorish designs; inscriptions and dates cunningly interwoven with geometrical figures. Vigo plates and Portuguese ware—a somewhat coarse but handsome faience—might be had in profusion. But so great was the demand for these pottery productions, that by the end of our stay the supply was completely exhausted, the town utterly sacked, the bazaar owners able to retire for a six months' holiday upon their profits.

Pyramid, alone, bred, so to say, a porcelain-and-curiosity famine; and the Commander went in for a large collection which, however, eventually came to wholesale grief. The very last day of our stay, I remember going the round of every china emporium and bazaar in the place, for a couple of dark blue Vigo plates I had promised to get for Pyramid. It took me a whole afternoon in a hired conveyance with an awning to it; a sort of running tent; a machine in which you feel particularly small, conspicuous and uncomfortable. The plates were worth four shillings each—being rare specimens of their kind. The conveyance—no bargain having been struck with the driver—came to —say £2 10*s.* In every shop, one after the other, without exception, the old Jew dealer looked melancholy, shook his head, and replied: "Very sorry, sir; not von left for lofe or money. Shust sent ze last on

board ze *Defence* for Captain Pyramid. Ah, sir! what a fine shentlemans dere! And give me my price too!"

And then the old Jew eyed me over half superciliously, half sympathetically, as much as to say that when I had grown another head and shoulders, I, also, might put in a modest claim to his admiration.

Strolling down the street that first morning, we met all sorts of nations and people in every description of garb and costume. Turks in turbans, Moors in white robes, Spanish women in mantillas, English in more familiar dress. Especially conspicuous were the Barbary Jews, looking like monks in their immense cloaks or abbas: some of

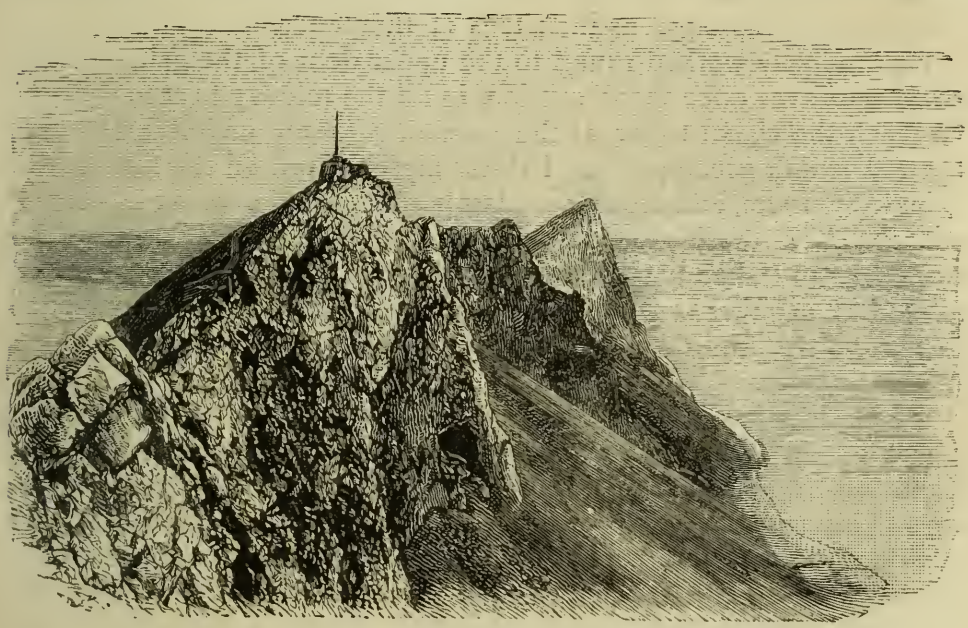
EUROPA POINT.

them, to all appearance, as old as the rock itself, many so dirty that instinctively you crossed to the other side of the pavement. I shall long remember, one morning seeing one of these dirty Jews in the corridor of the hotel, produce from under his garment, thick, hot and heavy as a blanket—he might have had no other on—a large basket of luscious fruit: figs and melons, apricots and bananas, grapes and oranges; all so artistically arranged as to look a perfect picture: an arrival straight from the garden of Eden, though certainly not despatched by the hands of an angel. It gave one a shock and a shiver. I made a mental note to eschew fruit in that hotel for ever after—and kept the resolution. If we could always say as much!

Armed with a pass for the galleries, we commenced a hard tug up the narrow, tortuous streets: but bad as was the ascent, we presently found the coming down far worse. Small grey houses on each

side were the abodes of the poorer classes of Gibraltar. Mules heavily laden were struggling upwards, like ourselves, driven by youths in white sleeves and a red scarf tied round the waist. Here and there a water-carrier, making an extraordinary noise, was dispensing, out of dark skins, tepid draughts to thirsty souls. The consideration was small, the gratification evidently great. Some of our paths were nothing but a series of steps, clumsy and uneven, that reminded one of Clovelly, more troublesome and tiring than the steepest hill. But there was the castle at last, which gives access to the galleries; an ancient Moorish building of the eighth century.

The galleries are the chief sight of Gibraltar. They are not picture exhibitions, as the intelligent but unenlightened reader might



Watch Tower.

suppose, but fortifications within the mountain; tunnels bored out of the solid rock, two or three miles in extent, winding in and out and round and round to a considerable height, and constructed with wonderful skill: not built up with brick and mortar, but simply rock passages: here, smooth and even as a piece of masonry; and there again, jagged and rugged, with sharp points and blocks that seem ready to loosen and fall.

Loopholes, at intervals, are the only outward token of the existence of the galleries. They are guarded by guns, one or two of them so large, it seems almost as puzzling to realise how they were brought to their present position, as it is hard to imagine how the stones for the Pyramids were taken across the sandy deserts of Egypt.

The change from the outside heat and glare to the coolness, and, in some parts, almost darkness of these passages, was almost too great a contrast to be pleasant or even safe. It was marvellous to thread

these winding excavations, ascending ever higher. From the loop-holes the views were extensive on all sides. Gibraltar lay far below; the town, with its diminished and diminishing houses, the flats and the neutral ground; to the left, a graveyard with apparently no care bestowed upon it; beyond all, a large round building—the modern amphitheatre—given up to the horrors of the bull-fight.

Then we came to a circular excavation, large and lofty in comparison with the passages, called "St. George's Hall." Here, sometimes, dances are given, and the fair Señoras and Señoritas of Gibraltar, English and Spanish, outrival each other; dispensing "wreathed smiles" according to fancy or caprice; until their partners, brave enough at the cannon's mouth, become mere cowards and puppets under the charges of the fairest of Earth's Light Brigade. War slays its thousands, these syrens their tens of thousands.

We gradually worked round to the upper door of the galleries and found ourselves once more outside, in all the midday heat and glare. To reach the signal tower at the summit was an undertaking, and when at length accomplished, I threw myself down on the sofa in the little sitting-room, and thought my last hour had come. A few moments' rest dispelled these gloomy thoughts, supported as it was by the most grateful "shandy-gaff" ever administered by handy sergeant or quaffed by expiring souls. Life and animation returned, and we were able to go out and do justice to the almost unrivalled view these heights disclose.

When Gibraltar belonged to Spain, the tower was called El Hacho "The Torch," because beacons were lighted here in case of danger. From the flagstaff you will now see the Union Jack flying, as it has been flying for nearly two hundred years. Night and morning, at sunrise and sunset, a gun booms forth—a sort of martial curfew. All ships going through the Straits are signalled, reported to the Governor, and passed on to "Lloyd's." What a leap from that solitary height to a bustling beehive of a room in the heart of a crowded city! The very thought of the one brings with it life and breath, the other a sense of suffocation and weariness.

Life and breath we certainly drew in as we gazed upon the Atlantic on one side, the Mediterranean on the other; the great ocean and the tideless sea joining hands, in perpetual friendship, at the foot of Gibraltar. There were the Straits the Rock guards so well, but even these "Straits," are from ten to twenty miles wide. Gibraltar lay snugly sleeping at our feet, almost on a level with the sea. Six miles across the bay, the town of Algeciras, more famous in the past than the present, reposed on the opposite shores, backed by towering mountains, hazy, and dreamlike in the morning sunshine.

Far off, stretched the coast of Morocco, the blue waters, as I have said, lapping the shores of ancient and interesting Tangiers. Very far away, on the opposite side, more hazy and dreamlike than

the hills of Algeciras, were the mountains of the Sierra Nevada with their eternal snows, that, partially melting in the heat ot summer, make Granada a land of perpetual running waters, and cool and fertilise its plains. Across the Straits the sergeant pointed out the position of Ceuta on the African Coast, which lies under the shadow of Mount Abyla—the "Pillar of Hercules" corresponding with Gibraltar.

The waters of the Mediterranean, calm, blue and sleeping, stretching far down and dividing the shores of Spain and Africa, conjured up thoughts and images of the past: all the romance and reality enveloping this tideless sea with a glamour and a charm none other can boast or claim. It borders some of the loveliest of earth's scenes, it has witnessed some of the greatest of earth's calamities. The strains of a Sappho have floated over its bosom, and the blue skies it reflects so majestically have been darkened by a cloud that buried cities in a living tomb.

We gazed long on the scene, leaning lazily over the walls, and enjoying to the utmost all the dreams and fancies it awakened; then came back with a sudden flight to earth, and a question to the sergeant about the monkeys. Were they to be seen? Alas, no. They had been up early that very morning, and probably would not come again unless towards night.

These monkeys are the wonders of the Rock; quite as marvellous as if bears and lions prowled about, and far less disagreeable to the emotions. Their origin, existence and abode seem a mystery. It is the one solitary spot in Europe where monkeys are found, and some pretend that they come over from Africa by that submarine passage no man of later times has penetrated. One may just as well think this, as it makes them more curious and interesting.

Once, these monkeys were in great force, then gradually diminished to a very few, and now again are slowly increasing. Their number at present is about thirty. They will suddenly appear on the Rock, perhaps after weeks of absence, scamper about, chatter and grin after their kind. No man can approach, and no one is allowed to molest them. Fifty years ago a soldier, disobeying the order, gave chase to a couple, and inflicted his own punishment. The poor fellow ran down the Rock so fast that, unable to stop in time, he fell over the precipice. The next day his body was buried to the sound of the muffled drum. This was half a century ago, and he now sleeps in an unknown grave; a martyr to monkeys.

We were sorry to miss the monkeys, but their attendance cannot be commanded, any more than can an eruption of Mount Vesuvius. A witch may be conjured, and the wind will come for whistling, it is said, and even a ghost may occasionally be summoned; but monkeys are not to be depended on. These Gibraltar monkeys are especially capricious. Sometimes they will come up from their

shadowy abode day after day; and again they will be unseen for weeks at a time.

So we departed without the monkeys. In returning, we took a short cut down the rock: the real Jacob's ladder of Gibraltar. Shall I ever forget that descent? I don't know the number of the steps, but, looking back, they seemed something under a million. They were small and narrow; on the left a grey stone wall level with one's shoulder, no railing to grasp if you suddenly turned giddy. The right side was open to the hill, quite a yawning precipice fearful to contemplate. To lose your head and fall over was certain death. The very fact of there being no protection and nothing to clutch in case of emergency, was enough in itself to turn the strongest brain.

When I had gone down about 250,000 steps, I suddenly felt the awfulness of the position. Suspended, like Mahomet's coffin, between earth and heaven, it all at once became physically impossible to move either one way or the other. The precipice yawned to receive me with open arms—much too open; it looked a dread abyss five miles deep. Imagination will run away with us, and we cannot help it any more than we can stem the tide. Broadley, who was running down like a lamp-lighter, was about 200,000 steps below me. He turned and looked up, and seeing my terrific position, laughed and roared and laughed again in the most exasperating manner, until the sergeant looked over the watch tower, and another put his head out of a distant loophole, and I wondered the very monkeys themselves did not scamper up to see what all the fun was about. They must have been at least half way over to Africa by way of the submarine passage.

But all things come to an end, and I got through at last, turned the tables upon Broadley and had the laugh against him. For, once at the bottom of the ladder, his legs felt as if they no longer belonged to him and performed all sorts of eccentric and independent evolutions. After we had threaded the winding streets of the slopes and jolted over the horribly uneven steps—now a long one and now a short, so that to keep time was impossible—and reached the level of the town, they refused their office altogether. By some marvellous process we managed to make the hotel at last, where I borrowed a smelling bottle and a fan; and after a mild restorative in the shape of a cup of tea diluted with brandy, conveyed him on board in a state of collapse and a sedan chair. The sentry mistook him for the Fez of Morocco, and presented arms in so flurried a manner that the bugle immediately followed suit and sounded an impromptu emperor's salute. Pyramid, Van Stoker and Darrille rushed up from the ward-room in a state of wonder—to receive an exhausted brother officer; and to relieve their guest of the grave responsibility of a Sole Charge.

MRS. CARR'S COMPANION.

CHAPTER I.

LADY MARY.

"WHAT is the matter, Olive?" said Lady Mary. "You look quite worn out!"

"Then I look as I feel, mamma. Really, Aunt Charlotte is too fidgety and unreasonable! I have had a most exhausting morning. If this kind of thing goes on much longer, my temper will be soured for life!"

"How fortunate, then, that Miss Keith has arranged to come this afternoon! Here is a letter announcing her arrival. Rose,"—Lady Mary turned to her younger daughter, who, seated in a low lounge chair, was arranging shades of wool for her crewel-work—"remind me to send the carriage for Miss Keith at four o'clock.—I suppose you would not care to go and meet her?—or you, Olive?"

Rose Egerton gently but decidedly negatived her mother's proposal, and Olive followed suit; adding:

"What is the use of taking any trouble about her? I prophesy that she will not be here six weeks hence. Poor victim! She little knows what she is undertaking. Let me see, Rose; how many companions has Aunt Charlotte worried away since this time last year? There was Miss Briggs, and Miss Horton, and that widow ——"

"Indeed, I have quite lost count," interrupted her sister, smiling; "but I know that she has had four since January."

"Your aunt is certainly trying," their mother owned, "and for that reason we must do all we can to make life endurable to Miss Keith in other ways. I trust she will suit us. Your Aunt Conyers generally knows what I shall like, and she strongly urged me to try her, inexperienced though she be."

"And so Aunt Conyers' approval of her appearance and manner, and some clergyman's vague recommendation, were Miss Keith's sole passport to the desirable situation of Aunt Charlotte's companion," smiled Rose. "Rather a risk, isn't it, mamma?"

Lady Mary Egerton drew herself up. If she herself indulged in doubts as to the wisdom of her choice no one else must do so. "My dear, I have perfect faith in your Aunt Conyers' judgment. If Miss Keith satisfies her that is sufficient for me."

Rose thought it prudent to change the subject. "Did I not see you speaking to that Mrs. Warburton, mamma, at the Deanery garden-party, yesterday?"

Whenever the name of an acquaintance is preceded by the demon-

strative pronoun, we may be pretty sure the speaker does not entertain a very favourable impression of the person in question. Lady Mary's tone was not more appreciative.

"Yes; Colonel Gore introduced her to me—at her own request, he said."

"I hear she gives out that she is a connection of ours; *cousin* she calls it."

"Cousin indeed!" echoed Lady Mary. "I believe a great great uncle of hers once figured among the Raleigh collaterals. Well, no doubt it helps her with some people, but it will not serve as a claim to *my* notice, as she perhaps expects. I may leave a card, as she lives so near, but I will have no intimacy between my daughters and those rather fast girls of hers."

"One cannot be too particular," assented Rose, "and so Olive seems to think. Olive! Who was the stranger—your partner at tennis yesterday? A dark-eyed man with a short brown beard, who wore an odd felt hat, and looked something between a brigand and an artist. He seemed talking to you afterwards quite like an old friend."

"He evidently expected to be received on that footing," and Olive's lip curled rather scornfully. "Miss Hammond brought him up and introduced him as her nephew, and an old friend of mine. She said he had just returned from Canada. He came prepared for a cordial greeting, but I thought it bettter to show him at once that things have changed since we were neighbours and played together as children in the fields at Kingston.

"John Thorold!" exclaimed Rose and her mother together. "I always liked that lad," added Lady Mary.

"And so he is nephew to old Mr. Hammond, the Minor Canon," commented Rose, "and certainly was guilty of lèse-majesty in forgetting the gulf which separates a Minor Canon's nephew from an Archdeacon's niece. Your haughty looks are all explained now, Olive."

"He is to spend some weeks at St. Brenda's," returned Olive, "and I did not wish him to presume on old intimacy as a claim to present friendship. I thought he would be calling me 'Olive' next, as he used to do."

"No fear of that while you treat him as you did yesterday."

"I am afraid he was rather hurt," said Olive thoughtfully, "for he went away very soon with a parting bow as distant as my own."

"You might have passed him on to me. To be sure he was always *your* friend, but I should have liked to speak to him for the sake of old times."

"You were talking to the Dean," returned Olive; "so I would not interrupt you."

"Ah! we were discussing that well-worn theme, the Romayne catastrophe," said Rose. "The Dean's brother-in-law, it appears, has lost a great deal of money by it. He had always such implicit

faith in the soundness of Romayne and Co. And the news of the failure and Mr. Romayne's sudden death was such a shock that it brought on a stroke of paralysis."

"How dreadful!" ejaculated Lady Mary. "But it is probably only one of many similar cases. I can never be sufficiently thankful that your brother is safe abroad! His entanglement (or engagement as he called it) with that Miss Romayne caused me the greatest anxiety. He is so rash and impetuous. I feared he would insist upon marrying her at once!"

"And so Miles would have done, mamma, but for your appeal to Miss Romayne," said Olive. "That was well thought of; nothing else could have prevented the mischief. The boldest step is often the wisest. There must have been some good in her, after all."

"Miles said she was very lovable," murmured Rose softly.

"She may be everything that Miles represented, my dear—although it seems very unlikely—but the daughter of a ruined and disgraced banker could be no fit match for my son," answered Lady Mary, stiffly.

Lady Mary could never forget that she was the daughter of an English Peer of ancient title. The consciousness enveloped her continually, as with a mantle of dignity.

"You see, mamma, Mr. Romayne was neither ruined nor disgraced when Miles took a fancy to his daughter," ventured Olive, always loth to hear her brother blamed.

"But he was both when Miles foolishly asked her to become his wife," replied her mother, coldly.

This being unanswerable, Olive kept silence.

"I repeat I am only thankful that things are no worse. We have at least gained time by my letter of appeal to Miss Romayne. She has promised me to hold no correspondence with Miles during his absence. He is out of the way for a year, perhaps two, and in that time *she* may marry, or *he* may marry. A great deal may happen in two years!"

Ah! yes, a great deal indeed, Lady Mary!

Archdeacon Egerton considered himself a fortunate man when his widowed sister-in-law, Lady Mary Egerton, consented to come and preside over his bachelor establishment, bringing her son and two little daughters to enliven its prebendal dullness. The arrangement was a mutual benefit, and for many years now Lady Mary had heard the great Cathedral clock of St. Brenda's chime away the hours of her pleasant, tranquil, well-ordered life. For many years she had moved about the handsome, dark, old-fashioned rooms of the Archidiaconal residence with gracious dignity, bringing her refining touches and softening influence wherever she came. For many years she had reigned in the Close a sovereign by right of election, arranging, giving judgment, managing everybody in her imperious, wilful way, just as she expected to do in her family circle. People might fuss and flutter a little rebelliously at first, but the impotent struggle was

soon over, and all opposition swept away in the irresistible tide of Lady Mary's determination.

Lady Mary had a knack of making people take her at her own valuation. When she spoke, her words were uttered clearly and deliberately, implying that the world around would do well to listen. If they *did* listen, people were generally rewarded with something worth hearing. Her very commonplaces (or what from anyone else would have been commonplaces) she recast in a new mould, and turned into bright originalities. This gift, and a thousand charms of voice and manner, were the afterglow clinging about her waning youth.

What mattered it to such a woman that her colouring was less brilliant, her luxuriant hair grey-sprinkled, and drawn away tidily beneath the matron's cap?

CHAPTER II.

THE NEW COMPANION.

It was the afternoon of the same day; a tranquil afternoon in late summer.

Venerable rooks were fluttering gravely about the stately old elm trees of St. Brenda's Cathedral Close, faintly stirring the languid air with their monotonous, musical "caw-caw." The grey buildings surrounding it were casting cool, sleepy shadows upon the well-kept green sward at their feet. The sweet, faint sounds of a chant came filtering out from an ivy-covered house where some of the choir boys were practising. A decrepit verger, dangling a bunch of heavy keys, emerged from a dark, low door, and, crossing the Close, disappeared among the shadows of an ancient archway.

Everything was old at St. Brenda's. The young face, looking nervously out from an old-fashioned barouche driven by a solemn old coachman, seemed quite out of place among its sober and antique surroundings. The carriage belonged to Lady Mary Egerton, and it was making its way towards a grey, gabled, wide-spreading house in one corner, shut in by a high garden wall.

The occupant of the carriage wished herself a hundred miles away when it presently stopped at a stern-looking, iron-clamped portal, which was thrown open at the summons of the massive bell. But there was nothing for it but to descend and follow the grave man-servant, who, explaining that his mistress was in the garden, led the traveller towards some ladies grouped together on the lawn.

A quaint sundial marked the centre of this trim lawn, which had collected to itself all the sunshine of the high-walled garden.

The sunbeams picked out the bright blossoms of some asters and scarlet geraniums bordering it, whose friendly faces seemed to give the stranger—with her own lovely face and refined air—quite a cheerful welcome among all the unfamiliar ones awaiting her. Tea

in cups of rare old china was smoking on a small table, and two or three ladies discussing it and some Close gossip at the same time, were clustered round it.

As the new-comer approached, feeling very forlorn and nervous, someone who she felt could only be Lady Mary came to meet her with outstretched hand and dignified yet courteous welcome. A certain stateliness of bearing, an old world courtesy, quite in keeping with these solemn precincts seemed to add height to the majestic figure of Lady Mary Egerton. Viola Keith remembered a brief description which had once been given her of her hostess long before she had the opportunity of judging for herself how it fitted.

"Rather awful some people find her until they know her well." "Rather awful," did Viola, too, find her at this moment. Yet her words were gracious.

"I am very glad to see you, my dear.—Rose! this is Miss Keith. Give her some tea and make her at home, while I finish my chat with Mrs. Bythesea."

Rose Egerton received the visitor with the winning cordiality of manner which made her so popular at St. Brenda's. She showed to especial advantage, dispensing her graceful hospitalities, and Viola Keith, fascinated into admiration, at once decided in her own mind that Lady Mary's youngest daughter was the prettiest creature she had ever seen. It was not only the beauty of feature and complexion, and of the wavy fair hair, which shone like an aureole about her graceful head; it was the unstudied grace of every attitude, the exquisite repose of manner and bearing, which lent so great a charm to Rose Egerton. She was one of those, as Viola found later, who understood the wisdom of silence. Rose seldom committed herself to many words, but the looks which accompanied her soft "Indeeds!" and "Ahs!" spoke volumes.

The tea was growing cool before Olive made her appearance, carrying a portfolio and some drawing materials. She had been sketching some ruins on the further side of the Cathedral, and was flushed with her hurried walk home. She vouchsafed scant notice to the stranger, turning away after her sister's graceful introduction to occupy herself with the tea.

But Miss Keith's eyes, henceforth, were involuntarily attracted to the elder sister's face. Its expression in repose was almost severe, so decided were the lines of mouth and chin, so clearly defined the outline of the really beautiful features. Very different in character to Rose's girlish grace and prettiness, which won you at the first glance, Olive's beauty only dawned upon you gradually. But once familiarised with that face, it never lost its charm; and on the rare occasions that it brightened into smiles, when the lips relaxed and the earnest eyes sparkled and shone, its sweetness became almost dazzling. So at least many people thought, and among them was soon reckoned Viola Keith.

"Have you seen anything of your uncle, Olive?" asked Lady Mary. "His tea is getting cold."

"I will take a cup in to him, mamma. I believe he is writing in his study."

The visitors looked awed at this mention of the Archdeacon's literary work. It was generally understood in St. Brenda's that Archdeacon Egerton used his pen a great deal, and although the fruits of his toil did not transpire to the world at large, perhaps the vague nature of his studies enveloped them with additional interest and distinction. St. Brenda's was very proud of the great literary light that condescended to shine in its midst.

Olive sugared the tea, saying as she did so: "Rose! I met Colonel Kane just now; he told me he should be here in a few moments."

The slight increase of colour which tinged Rose's cheeks made her lovelier than before; as, perhaps to cover her embarrassment she rose, and, offering to show Viola her room, led the way indoors.

The comfortable, chintz-draped room, with latticed window-panes and creeper-framed casements, was a restful haven for a weary traveller; and as the door closed on Rose, Viola sank, with a feeling of relief, into a large arm-chair by the window, to enjoy the rest of solitude and the luxury of reviewing at ease her various new impressions.

Presently the sound of voices in the garden below disturbed her reverie. Two people were crossing the lawn towards the house. One was Rose Egerton; the other a tall, fine-looking man in the prime of life; nearer fifty than forty, perhaps; whom Viola at once decided must be Colonel Kane. The looks which he bent on the graceful girl at his side sufficiently explained the relationship between them. Why did Viola sigh as she turned away?

When Lady Mary entered the drawing-room shortly before dinner, which in summer time was fixed for seven o'clock, she found it only occupied by the new companion, Miss Keith, who, by the light of the wax candles, which the dark old room already needed, stood intently regarding a picture hanging above the carved mantelpiece. Her hostess, sweeping softly over the thick carpet, reached her side almost unperceived. Viola started at her approach, and would have turned away; but Lady Mary, laying a detaining hand upon her arm, said calmly: "Ah! you are looking at the portrait of my son. He is a soldier, as you see, and is now serving in South Africa."

"It is—I mean—is it considered a good likeness?"

"Very. It was taken just before he sailed. He gave it to me for a parting present."

Lady Mary sighed; a sigh which her listener echoed—perhaps out of sympathy. Then recovering herself, Lady Mary took Viola by both hands and drew her forward into the circle of soft candlelight.

"I have not seen you properly yet, Miss Keith. People are all alike in those hats. Come here and let me look at you."

Viola shrank beneath the long and silent gaze of those earnest

eyes She began to blush and tremble with strange shyness. Yet, as she might have known, the severest critic could scarcely have been ill-pleased with the picture before him; the well-shaped head, with its soft, shining hair; the sweet girlish face, which looked so fair and beautiful, against the black dress.

"My sister often does my commissions for me. I like her taste," said Lady Mary at last. "I foresee that we shall be good friends, my dear." And with a kind pressure of her hands, she at last released her embarrassed prisoner.

Viola appeared strangely agitated. Her lips moved as though she were about to speak. But just then the door opened and the sisters appeared, closely followed by Colonel Kane. Olive, who had no eye in particular to please, was in simple white; but Rose wore a dress of pale blue, very becoming to her blonde beauty, and at her throat nestled a lovely lemon rose, which Viola had noticed in Colonel Kane's buttonhole as they walked together in the garden. He looked older, now, without his hat; and when, after their introduction, he presently came and spoke to Viola, she noticed that the hair was worn from off his temples and was already growing grey. But Colonel Kane was a fine-looking man, in spite of his fifty years, and Rose had good reason to be proud of the lover who watched over her with such tender attention and so courtly a deference.

Dinner was announced before the master of the house made his appearance, and without waiting, they proceeded to the dining-room, where they found a little old gentleman who, it appeared, bore the style and title of Archdeacon Egerton.

The qualifications fitting the Archdeacon to become a dignitary of the Cathedral Church of St. Brenda—where the kindly old gentleman occasionally read inaudible lessons from the great brazen eagle, and preached in his turn, learned discourses that were caviare to the multitude—were a profound knowledge of Assyriology, and a strongly developed taste for the deciphering of cuneiform records. He had about him the dazed and dreamy air of having just emerged from burrowing in underground recesses; and indeed this, figuratively speaking, was his daily task. It was evident that Archdeacon Egerton had forgotten the existence of his sister-in-law's protégée two minutes after her entrance.

But as the dinner progressed his abstraction wore off; some observation of Colonel Kane's roused his interest, his eye lighted up, and to the stranger's surprise, he launched into talk illustrated with such brilliancy of wit and metaphor that her attention was henceforth completely absorbed. Lady Mary, in her turn, was surprised to find that the girl, who but half an hour ago, alone with her, had seemed consumed with embarrassment and confusion, was now quite at home, listening intelligently or bearing her part in the conversation with the easy grace of one accustomed to society. In the wonted atmosphere Viola had forgotten herself, but in the drawing-room, later, the painful self-consciousness partially returned. The Archdeacon had gone back

to his study, and the lamp of his brilliant intellect had died down for the present into no more than the low glimmer necessary for his explorations. The lovers had strolled into the ante-room adjoining, whence came the low sound of their murmured conversation. Olive, who never cared to waste time, sat at the centre table engrossed with foreign books and dictionaries, leaving her coffee untasted. Lady Mary called Viola to a seat on the sofa beside her.

"If you are not too tired, Miss Keith, I should like you presently to make my sister-in-law's acquaintance. She has her own rooms and does not often come among us; never, when we have a visitor like Colonel Kane, for instance: although, as of course you have guessed, that visitor is only my daughter's future husband," and Lady Mary smiled. "From constant ill-health, the Archdeacon's sister (who is a widow, as, I think, you know) has become rather"—she paused for a word—"rather particular and ——"

"Irritable," suggested Olive, who had apparently been listening, looking up with the suspicion of a smile hovering about her mouth.

"Yes; irritable," repeated her mother firmly, with a look at Olive which rebuked the interruption. "Miss Keith, remember I explained in my letter that you were undertaking no easy task; you entered upon it fully warned!"

"And should have done so had it been ten times harder still," said Viola, in low, distinct tones.

Olive glanced up with a look of surprise; but the speaker's face was bent down and did not enlighten her.

"I am sure," Lady Mary went on, "that you will bear as patiently as possible with Mrs. Carr's little infirmities, and do your best to please her. You will have plenty of leisure time. My sister-in-law often spends many hours alone from choice, and whenever she does not want you, we shall always like to have your company."

"You are very good," murmured Viola, without looking up.

"Mrs. Carr is usually at her best in the evening, and I should like you to make a favourable impression. Have you finished your coffee? Then, we will go at once," said Lady Mary, cheerfully.

Viola rose directly, as anxious as her hostess to have the ordeal over.

"You must not allow yourself to be discouraged. I feel sure you will succeed in satisfying Mrs. Carr."

"And so prove yourself the eighth wonder of the world," added Olive, so softly that only Viola, in passing, caught the words.

It may be imagined that they did not tend to reassure the new companion as she followed her stately guide along two or three thickly-carpeted passages, the last of which ended in a door concealed by a heavy curtain. This being drawn aside, and the door softly opened, Lady Mary led Viola into a small ante-chamber in which a solitary lamp just made darkness visible. A maid seated close beside it was trying to work by the dim light.

"Is Mrs. Carr expecting us, Walton?"

"Yes, my Lady; I will tell her you are here."

She passed behind a curtain separating the room from another beyond it, announced the visitors, then held it back for them to enter. Lady Mary took the hand of her trembling companion, and led her forward.

"This is Miss Keith, Charlotte. I was sure you would be impatient to make her acquaintance."

A small fire was burning in the grate, summer though it was, and in a large cushioned chair close by was propped a small invalid, a withered and still more diminutive edition of her brother the Archdeacon, with a pale, sallow, thin face, from which two penetrating grey eyes looked at, or rather through, the visitor, who was at once afflicted with a painful idea that she had become suddenly transparent.

Mrs. Carr touched Viola's cold hand, and dropped it again with a grunt of greeting. Walton placed chairs for the visitors; one for Lady Mary beside her mistress, one for Miss Keith opposite, and went away.

"I am glad you are come, Mary." Viola thought the greeting sounded cordial, although she was apparently not included in it. "I want you to see these candles. Would you believe, after all I have said, that Walton has *again* put them in the one only place in the room where the light shines *into* my eyes, and *not* on my book? You never will believe but that these annoyances are all my fancy, so I determined on having them left there just to convince you to the contrary."

"And now, having served their purpose, let me move them," said Lady Mary, goodnaturedly. "There, is that better?"

"Oh! never mind; it is too late now; they might have stayed there all night for ought I cared," answered the invalid, ungraciously.

Her sister-in-law sat down again, with a resigned expression. "Well, in future you will have Miss Keith to make you comfortable, Charlotte, so that I hope you will get on better. My dear," to Viola, "will you give me that hand screen?"

Viola rose to reach it from its place on the wall, which gave Mrs. Carr an opportunity of exchanging a whisper—a too audible whisper—with her sister-in-law. "Pretty, but too pale!"

Viola heard the criticism as Lady Mary perceived, and belied it by the flush which immediately crimsoned her white throat, even to the ears. She kindly gave a turn to the conversation. "Colonel Kane dined with us this evening, Charlotte, and remains the night here."

"Was he as stiff and starched as usual? Colonel Kane is not what a girl would have fancied when I was young."

Lady Mary drew herself up and spoke severely.

"Colonel Kane was gentlemanly and agreeable as he always is, with that old-fashioned courtesy which becomes him so well."

"Oh! yes, there is a great deal that is old-fashioned about Colonel Kane. It is just that I complain of."

"If Rose is satisfied, I suppose that is sufficient," was the frigid reply.

"Quite—until she finds out her mistake, which she will do some day. Rose, with her good looks might marry anyone; that is, if she were not so shallow and frivolous."

Even Lady Mary's patience seemed exhausted at last, and she rose from her seat. "Now, Miss Keith, you had better say good night. Mrs. Carr will like to go on with her book."

"No, I shall not. My eyes are strained and aching already. But Miss Keith might read to me a little before she goes. As she is here she may as well make herself useful."

Viola could not refuse, and nervously took up a volume which lay open on the table. Lady Mary stood irresolute for a moment; then, meeting a beseeching glance from Viola, which seemed to beg her to remain, sighed and resumed her seat. The book was Emerson's "Social Aims." Miss Keith began to read, but although she managed to keep her voice under tolerable command, the hand which held the volume was trembling visibly. When the essay came to an end, Lady Mary again made a decided move.

"Miss Keith is tired, Charlotte; that must do for to-night. To-morrow when she is rested, she will read as long as you like. Won't you, my dear?" And without giving time for any objections, she bade her sister-in-law good night and waited while Viola followed her example.

"Good night, child. You have a pleasant voice, and a clear utterance, and when you have learned not to gabble in that school-girlish fashion, I shall no doubt like your reading."

And having earned this qualified praise, Viola retired, with a sensation of relief, as the heavy outer curtain fell behind them.

"Lady Mary, will you excuse my coming into the drawing-room again to-night? I am very tired."

"So I see, my dear; and you will do wisely to go to bed at once, and wake refreshed for your duties in the morning. Come with me; I will show you a near way of communication between these rooms and your own, which, as a rule, will be more convenient for you than the long round by the front staircase."

She turned down a narrow passage—they walked a few yards, up half a dozen steps—another level—down two more—a turn to the right, and there was Viola's room reached in a few moments.

"There—you will remember the way? Good night, Miss Keith. You impressed Mrs. Carr favourably, I think, and will get on well with her. You read very pleasantly."

"It was very good of you to stay," said Viola, gratefully. "I shall feel braver to-morrow, but it is all so strange." Her voice faltered.

"Although there is no need for you to be so much afraid of us, my dear," said Lady Mary kindly. "We shall try and make you happy at St. Brenda's. Good night."

Lady Mary would have been puzzled had she turned suddenly and met the yearning, wistful gaze which followed her retreating figure, as she walked away down the wainscoted passage, from the threshold of the room where Viola still stood with clasped hands and bended head. She would have been more puzzled still, a moment later, had she seen the new companion, as the sound of her footsteps died away in the distance, close the door and throw herself upon the bed in a flood of tears.

In the drawing-room Lady Mary found Olive still engrossed with her books.

"Back at last, mamma! And how did the meeting go off? Did you not feel as you walked away like an Agamemnon leading some pale Iphigenia to the altar of sacrifice?"

"I feel that Miss Keith is a great deal too good and pretty for the post she has undertaken," answered her mother gravely.

"I agree with you. It is like setting a thoroughbred horse to draw a brewer's dray, or using a dish of Sèvres china to bake a pie in."

"And Olive," said Lady Mary, "why did you frighten her so with your hints and interruptions? The poor thing was actually trembling with nervousness, especially when your aunt made her read aloud. I wanted to come away (for a little of your aunt's company goes a long way) but the poor girl's looks were so wistfully entreating that I could not desert her."

"Ah! mother, Miss Keith has found the soft spot in your heart already. You will spoil her!"

"Not I! She must do her duty if she wishes to win her way into my good graces. But *if* she does her duty, I trust, Olive, that both Rose and yourself will do your best to be kind to her. She will find the life very new and irksome, I fear. Before her parents' death she was probably as independent of the world as you are. I understand from your Aunt Conyers that family misfortunes alone compel her to earn her living in this way."

"I don't like people who have seen better days and are always throwing them at you," said Olive shortly. "And it certainly is not worth while to become friendly with such mere birds of passage as Aunt Charlotte's companions."

CHAPTER III.

IN BONDAGE.

While Lady Mary was arranging her flowers next morning, a task which she always took upon herself, the Archdeacon's head appeared at the conservatory door.

"Mary, you will have a visitor to luncheon. If I am not back from the Chapter meeting when he arrives, be kind enough to entertain

him for a few moments. He is an architect, and a clever young fellow."

Her brother-in-law's seldom expressed wishes were law to Lady Mary. She prepared herself to be particularly gracious to his protégé, who appeared punctually at the appointed hour, to find Lady Mary alone. A personable looking man of eight-and-twenty, or thirty, perhaps, with the simple, unembarrassed manners of one accustomed to mix with his fellow-creatures on equal terms, free alike from servility and haughtiness.

Lady Mary had him all to herself for at least ten minutes before the girls appeared, Rose first, leaving the door open for her sister. Lady Mary had not caught the stranger's name upon his entrance; she turned to inquire it before introducing him. But ere she could speak, Olive came in and went straight up to the visitor: "How do you do, Mr. Thorold?"

He bowed gravely, but without taking the hand she extended to him, and in the general surprise no one but Olive herself noticed the omission.

"Thorold!" exclaimed her mother. "Is it possible you are John Thorold!"

He turned to her with a smile; a pleasant smile. "I saw that Lady Mary did not recognise the boy she treated so kindly in the old days at Kingston," he answered.

"And you never told me who you were!"

"Those days were so long ago; feelings change, and old friends pass out of memory," he said gravely. "It is not everyone who cares to be reminded of the past."

He did not even glance at Olive, who might have been miles absent from his thoughts, but she appropriated the speech, and held her head higher than ever as she followed the others into the dining-room.

Mr. Thorold occupied the seat at his hostess's left hand, opposite Colonel Kane, and Lady Mary beckoned Viola to the vacant place beside him. Viola found the genial society of the luncheon-table refreshing after her long morning with the querulous invalid; and although she could not enter much into the conversation, which dealt chiefly with reminiscences of times and places unknown to her, she listened with interest; charmed, like Lady Mary herself, by the pleasant ease and frankness with which Mr. Thorold gave details of his Canadian life and prospects of success in his profession.

"Ah! Miles always said you must be an architect or engineer," said Lady Mary.

"My old playmate is a soldier, I hear, and so realising his wishes also."

"Yes. He takes after his mother's family. My people, the Raleighs, have always been a fighting race, from the days of the Conqueror downwards. An old friend of my father offered Miles an appointment on his staff when he was ordered to South Africa."

"Do you often hear from him?"

"Yes, he is a tolerable correspondent. We had a long letter this morning. He seemed well and happy, and wrote in fairly good spirits, poor fellow. Miss Keith, I am glad to see that you have gained a little colour. You were looking pale when you came in just now."

The colour deepened still more in Viola's cheeks as this remark drew all eyes upon her, and she was truly thankful when the Archdeacon's entrance claimed the general attention.

He greeted the visitor affably. "Ah, Thorold! you have found your way here! You will be pleased to hear that, as I expected, the Chapter has selected your designs for our new library. I am happy to be the first to bring you the good news."

A flush rose to the young man's brow; a flush of gratification at unhoped-for success; but he answered with composure. "It is a great compliment. I am sure, Mr. Archdeacon, that I have to thank you for this success," he added modestly.

"Not at all! not at all! Your own merit entirely. Your drawings spoke for themselves, and I trust this is only the beginning of a long career of prosperity."

Directly after luncheon, the Archdeacon carried Mr. Thorold off to his study to discuss plans and estimates, and the ladies saw him no more. Before they dispersed, Colonel Kane's stanhope drove up to the door, and he came to take leave of his hostess.

"And when shall we see you again?" asked Lady Mary, as they shook hands.

"Not before Sunday, I think."

"Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday! Four whole days!" said Rose softly, with a rather aggrieved air.

He turned to her with a tender aside. "Dear Rose! I cannot help myself. I have to go to Town on business between now and then. And, by-the-by, when I come back," turning to Lady Mary, "I shall ask leave to bring a gay Hussar nephew of mine to make your acquaintance—and Rose's," holding out his hand to the latter. "He is ordered to join the depôt of his regiment here, and is coming to pay me a visit at the Abbey first."

"Bring him with you when you come to us on Sunday; we shall have a spare room for him."

"You are very good. He will be delighted to accompany me. Good-bye until then, Lady Mary."

Mrs. Carr, oftener than not, limited the bath-chair drives which were her only recreation, to the extent of her brother's garden, or at most, the Cathedral Close; and in either case, while she was drawn slowly to and fro under shelter of the grey old walls, which, even in their dilapidated condition, served as a barrier against the cold winds, Viola was at liberty to turn her steps wherever she liked. She was a

good walker and had been accustomed to a country life in the old days before she had taken upon herself the bonds of servitude. It was now one of her few pleasures to walk briskly until she was beyond the city walls; and in the green meadows and shady lanes outside its boundaries, to enjoy solitude for an hour or two, with, at least the semblance of, freedom.

One morning's experience had been sufficient to show her that the task she had undertaken was to the full as difficult as Lady Mary's warnings, and Olive's hints, had represented it. It would need, she foresaw, all her forbearance and pity for this ailing mind in an ailing body, to bear with patience the varying moods, and continued complainings, of the captious invalid, whom nothing could please. Often and often, during the weeks that followed, Viola would compare herself to some poor story-book heroine, in despair over the impossible tasks of a malevolent fairy. She felt like a Danaid pouring a wealth of service and attention into a crazy bucket only to see it filter aimlessly away. Mrs. Carr's grievances were generally imaginary, but pressed just as heavily upon her unhappy attendants as though they had been really substantial. The alternations of carping criticism which now and then took their place were at least as hard to bear. The invalid's clever, bitter tongue stung its subject like a scorpion and curled venomously round the innocent victim of the moment.

After her brief refreshing absences, Viola always returned to her self-imposed task with new resolutions to be patient and much-enduring, but, as may be imagined, with no great alacrity. On this first afternoon she found Lady Mary with her sister-in-law, a foreign letter, which she was just unfolding, in her hand.

"From my son," she explained to Viola. "I was going to read it to Mrs. Carr. You need not go; there are no secrets."

Viola took a chair as far as possible from the reader, and drawing a piece of work from her pocket, bent her head over it. But before Lady Mary could open her lips, came Walton, summoning her to the drawing-room to receive some visitors.

"There! it is useless to begin. But I will leave the letter with you if you like, and Miss Keith can bring it back to me presently."

An unmistakable expression of disappointment came over the companion's face as Lady Mary departed in that peculiar way of hers, combining Eile mit Weile, as the Germans would express it. Mrs. Carr spread out the closely-written sheets, murmuring to herself a series of running comments as she began half aloud:

"My Dearest Mother,"—(I wonder how many others he has!) "Your budget of home news was quite refreshing" (h'm—h'm) "nothing doing here as yet; no interests to make me forget the old ones." (How atrociously he writes!) "Above all, that which has filled my thoughts these many months past." (The Romayne affair, of course; the girl must have been an artful puss to draw him on so far!) "But

I won't remind you of the one sus—" (no) "subject upon which we differ. I went with the General last week to a ball at Government House; Lathom introduced me to his sister, a pretty girl with something about the eyes which reminded me of—there I am again! We have changed our quarrels?" (no) "quarters since I last wrote. This is a healthy spot but dull as possible, and ——"

"Dear! dear! there never was an Egerton who could write decently! Miss Keith, where are you? Come and see if you can make this out? Can you read strange handwriting?"

"Sometimes. I will try if you like, Mrs. Carr."

Mrs. Carr's companion took the letter and began to read. A sudden attack of shyness seemed to have seized her, however, for her voice sounded hoarse and unnatural, but her clear young eyes seemed to run easily along the lines to the conclusion of loving messages to the home party, including a specially respectful, but more formal one to "Aunt Charlotte," over which that lady smiled grimly.

"H'm! you read as glibly as though the writing were familiar. You needn't blush, child! I dare say that I might have done the same when my eyes were young like yours. The letter is egotistical, of course, as might be expected, but Miles has a knack of making his epistles interesting. It is perfectly ridiculous the fuss his mother makes over that boy! No one will ever be good enough for him, that is clear. Yet, like many other mothers, my Lady has a decided objection to Master Miles choosing a wife for himself!"

Viola replaced the letter in its envelope, thinking, as she did so, of the miles and miles of land and sea which stretched between it and its writer. Then she stole back to her seat, for what concern had she with Mrs. Carr's nephew or his choice?

The comfortable pew in the Cathedral of St. Brenda's allotted to its Archdeacon, extended its range of oak-carved stalls immediately to the right of the pulpit, so that if its occupants failed to profit by the discourses preached therefrom they had only themselves to blame. Many of the congregation, indeed, lower down in the social scale, to whom fell a portion of cramped benches and torturing backboards, would think with no little envy how devotion was made easy to the Close families in the midst of arm-chairs and velvet cushions. But even a velvet cushion may be stuffed with thorns, and the balance of mental ease between the tenants of higher and those of the lower seats, in the synagogue, is more equal than people imagine.

The service had already begun on the Sunday following Viola's arrival at St. Brenda's when from her seat in the retired corner immediately below the pulpit, she saw Colonel Kane's fine head towering above the rest of the congregation as he was ushered into one of the elaborate canopied stalls at the western end apportioned to the Cathedral dignitaries, and those of the laity whom they specially

delighted to honour. Following close behind him, came another gentleman, as tall, but more youthful-looking and slightly formed, whom she rightly supposed to be the expected nephew. They settled themselves in their places and then stood to join in the "Venite" which was already ascending joyfully to the vaulted roof, caught up alternately by decani and cantori. Colonel Kane's eyes naturally sought his fiancée and dwelt with satisfaction upon her sweet face, seen in fair relief against its oaken background. His nephew's glance, following in the same direction, was also turned towards their pew. Viola looked and looked again. Then an uncontrollable tinge of colour dyed her face, and lowering her thick black veil, she shrank back into the shadow of the pillar. A tumult of recollections, fears, and scruples filled her mind, and it was long before she could recall her wandering thoughts to a remembrance of where she was, and with many struggles, and many upbraidings of conscience, concentrate them upon the service again.

When it came to an end she hung back, allowing the crowd to separate her so completely from the rest of her party that the introductions were over, and the gentlemen had walked on ahead with Rose and her mother, leaving Viola when she at last emerged, at liberty to reach home unobserved, by a short cut through the Cathedral. Gaining her own room, she threw off bonnet and gloves and began pacing to and fro in perplexity. "How unfortunate!" she ejaculated. "How truly unfortunate that Colonel Kane's nephew should prove to be he of all people! It will ruin everything, and crush all my hopes, unless—yet how can I humiliate myself to ask a favour of him? It is cruelly perplexing! Wilfred Kane—the very last man either to understand or appreciate my motives! What shall I do? It is impossible that I can meet him without first explaining, and asking his silence. And yet—No, I will explain nothing, but simply appeal to his generosity—if he has any! I must excuse myself from lunch, and trust to finding him alone between this and dinner-time."

Captain Kane was lingering in the conservatory after lunch, while Olive was preparing for the walk to a country church at a little distance from St. Brenda's, watching his uncle and Rose appearing and disappearing among the openings of the shrubbery walk, and thinking discontentedly what dull company engaged people always were—when a light step sounded near, and a slight black-robed figure flitted like an apparition through the conservatory, and, with nervous fingers, began trying to sever a spray of the creeper covering the wall. Glad of any distraction from his weary state of boredom, he stepped forward with an, "Allow me," which brought him to her side.

She turned abruptly and faced him. He fell back a step, uttering an exclamation of surprise. "You, Miss ——"

"Hush!" she interrupted quickly. "I am Miss Keith henceforward to you and everyone. Will you please forget that you ever

knew me by any other name? or indeed that you ever knew me at all! That will be better still."

"But I don't understand ——" he was beginning.

"Nor is it necessary that you should," drawing herself up. "You can understand at least that my recollection of the past is not so pleasant that I care to have it continually recalled to me. Simply, as a favour" (the words seemed with difficulty to pass her lips), "will you do as I ask?"

He stood facing her, with a slight smile curling his lips and unmistakeable admiration expressed in his eyes.

"Well!" she asked almost haughtily. "I am waiting."

"Excuse me," he said, bowing low, "if the pleasure of being entreated by such lips is so new that I am unwilling to curtail it."

"Enough; let me pass, if you please," she returned coldly.

"Stay!" he interrupted, with a complete change of tone. "You ought to know that your slightest wish is, and always has been, law to me. Of course I will do as you ask, happy that for once I am able to please you so easily."

She inclined her head by way of thanks, though coldly still, and turned towards the house. But he delayed her again. "Wait a moment; you are forgetting your flower, or" (as he presented it) "is it that you begrudge me a few moments of your company?"

Olive's opportune entrance spared her an answer. With a relieved countenance she re-entered the drawing-room and Captain Kane followed.

"Oh! here you are, Captain Kane. Let me introduce you—but perhaps you have already made each other's acquaintance?" looking inquiringly from him to Viola.

It was Captain Kane who answered. "Yes, we did not wait for a formal introduction—Miss—Keith took me on trust at once as your mother's expected guest, and I—had already heard of her. Are we to have the pleasure of your company, Miss Keith?"

Viola had had time to recover her composure. She calmly answered his question and then hastened away to her afternoon duties, relieved of her fears and trusting the matter was settled once and for all.

Yet she was not altogether pleased to hear Lady Mary announce at breakfast next morning that the uncle and nephew had consented to stay another day, so as to be present at a dinner-party which she had fixed for that evening. "Not a formal affair; only a few of our friends in the Close whom I wanted to ask. By-the-by, Miss Keith, Mrs. Bythesea has just sent an excuse for her daughter; I must ask you to take her place and make the table even."

Lady Mary's request made with that gracious and winning smile was, like a royal invitation, equivalent to a command, but Viola acceded to it reluctantly, with forebodings of discomfort which events justified.

(*To be continued.*)

TURN HIM OUT!

(THE QUESTION OF THE DAY, AS DISCUSSED IN A COUNTRY TOWN.)

CAPTAIN and Mrs. Goldy were reading their letters at the breakfast table, when the latter exclaimed, joyously:

"The Women's Suffrage meeting is to-day, George! Miss Kettleby and Miss Knocker are to speak, and I am invited to sit on the platform. Such an opportunity for hearing all those noble women have to say!"

"Even *part* of what they have to say would be something!" quietly observed Captain Goldy.

"I'm so *sorry* you won't be able to hear them, George, but men are not admitted."

"Never mind, Nelly," said the good-natured husband: "I'll take you down there, and hear the speeches from you second-hand this evening."

The hour drew near; and as Captain Goldy and his wife approached the scene of so many high hopes and aspirations, they found crowds of women, of all ranks, ready to rally round the cause.

"What a glorious sight!" cried pretty Mrs. Goldy, enthusiastically.

"Which? That one in the green specs?"

"How tiresome you are, George!" reproved she. "In these enlightened days one may hope for something more than being jeered at, thank goodness?"

Some prominent leaders, welcoming Mrs. Goldy with effusion, carried her off, leaving condescending nods for her husband. He philosophically drew out his cigar-case, and determined to perform the graceful office of sentry over the premises which had swallowed up his wife.

Eloquence is no word for the flow of language that distinguished the address of the erudite single lady on the platform to inaugurate the meeting. She was listened to breathlessly, and applauded loudly. Some school-girls at the back of the room formed then and there an unutterable resolve that

"Women should be slaves no longer!"

The next speaker, when in the midst of an impassioned appeal to all present to "claim and hold their rights," was interrupted by a loud groan and a hiss.

The chairwoman rose majestically and beheld the offender. A *man!* Was it possible? In clarion tones she called out forcibly,

"Order! Order!"

Resuming her speech, she was striving to demonstrate that woman was always man's equal—often, ah! how often his superior!—when

the man began again. Horrible groans and hisses enraged the whole assembly.

"Turn him out!" commanded the chairwoman, at the highest pitch of authority.

Happy thought! All the room turned to see the mandate carried into execution. But nobody stirred. It seemed suddenly to have struck them all that it was not their particular individual business to interfere.

They were all women, you see; all able to talk, some able to listen; but as yet it was undetermined which of them had the necessary amount of muscular strength required to eject a contumacious intruder of the male species.

Feminine voices murmured in the body of the hall; a few went on to shrieks. The valiant women on the platform, flushed with mighty wrath, enjoined silence.

"Silence! Silence! Silence!" all of them speaking at once.

"Very annoying, dear Miss Knocker—just as Miss Kettleby was coming to the point she is so strong on!" cried Mrs. Goldy, indignantly.

"Most unmanly," said the chairwoman.

"*Shall* we say that?" inquired a learned single lady, with biting sarcasm. "Is it not rather *man-like* to try and suppress the diffusion of useful knowledge? Knowledge which strikes at the root of their power."

"True, most true," came fervent responses. Groans and hisses continued.

Miss Kettleby tried again to make herself heard; she spoke louder and louder; but above the cheers came the former dissentient sounds.

Acting on a mighty impulse, Mrs. Goldy left the platform and sped right down the body of the hall, followed by the eager eyes of her colleagues. They viewed herself and her slight and charming form with admiration, and gave vent to it aloud.

"*She* is going to turn him out!"

But she did not. She passed out into the street instead, where her husband was placidly pacing up and down with his cigar. With flushed cheeks, she attacked him, gaspingly.

"George! There's a man in there!"

With calm surprise George drew his cigar from his lips. "Only one man among so many women? Poor fellow!"

"You don't understand me, George. Men are not admitted——"

"Then how is he there?"

"He has got in, and he interrupts us! He won't let one of us say a word."

Captain Goldy held up his hands in grave warning. "Come, my dear—stick to facts a *little* short of the marvellous. More than three hundred women prevented 'saying a word' by one man! He must be *more* than man!"

"George, George, *what* are we to do? I came out to appeal to you ——" and the piteous face of his wife induced Captain Goldy to offer his sound advice.

"Turn him out!"

"Who's to do it?" sobbed Mrs. Goldy, humiliated by the disclosure. "We *can't*. Will you?"

"*I!*" cried the captain, biting his lips. "I am not a woman, Nelly."

At this moment the doors flew madly open, and out poured the "meeting" in angry confusion.

Captain Goldy hailed a passing hansom, in which he whirled his wife off the scene, first raising his hat with innocent politeness to the chairwoman, and leaving an encouraging nod to the pale-faced young gentleman who had routed the ladies so effectually.

Pretty Mrs. Goldy sat silent and subdued all the evening. She was meditating, and her meditations were not unwholesome, on the difficulties in the way of

"Turning him out."

AN APRIL SHOWER.

The land with laughing light was crowned,
All shadow scorning,
When swiftly rose a cloud, and frowned
Upon the morning;
Down in a torrent dropped amain
The clatt'ring, patt'ring, sobbing rain.
Spring used her power;
The sunbeams through the cloudlet shone,
And in a trice the storm was gone—
An April shower.

My lady's smiling face was decked
With gay contentment,
When one small doubt our pleasure checked,
And brought resentment.
Her heart a prey to jealous fears,
Down fell the dancing, glancing tears.
Love used his power;
And kisses warm the cloud removed,
Till, like the storm, her anger proved—
An April shower.

SYDNEY GREY.

R. AND E. TAYLOR. M. ELLEN STAPLES.

THEN ALL AT ONCE, WITH A SOBBING WAIL OF DESPAIR, MRS. HATHERLEY THREW HERSELF IN FRONT OF HIM AND BARRED THE WAY.

THE ARGOSY.

MAY, 1883.

WINIFRED POWER.

CHAPTER XIII.

ALL HER WORLD AGAINST HER.

WINIFRED had left The Limes declaring she would never enter it again, and the reader does not need to be told that Mrs. Chandos-Fane returned home in a mood of long-suffering dignity admirable to contemplate. She lighted her candle with her own hand, shot one wary glance at her daughter out of the extreme corner of her eyes, then gathered her skirts tightly round her ankles, as if she were going to step over a gutter, and vanished upstairs.

This was the first instalment of the general snubbing which began for Winifred from that evening.

The next day a packet was brought her, at sight of which the blood rushed to her cheeks, for she recognised Mark's handwriting in the address. But there was no word inside from him: only extracts from the newspapers, containing the account of Martha's trial. She read them, but the effect produced upon her was far other than that intended. Mark's conviction had doubtless been that a perusal of "the facts" would convert her. Winifred on the contrary read between the lines, and in every protestation of Martha's innocence by the counsel, every allusion to the "prisoner's" demeanour, every remark about John and his sister, she saw a fresh confirmation of her own belief.

She returned the packet as it had been sent to her—without a line; thinking to herself as she did so, that probably no further communication would ever pass between herself and Mark. Her heart died within her; but she would not own that she suffered.

Nevertheless she turned white and red by turns and found not so much as a syllable of greeting a few hours later when Mark walked into her studio.

He looked disturbed, and even a little sullen, like one impelled to come against his will. Indeed, he had not taken the step without a

struggle. He was masterful by nature, and held that submission was a woman's duty. His feeling for Winifred had rather surprised him: he had fallen in love with her in his own despite. But he was not very deeply in yet—or at least he thought so—and his pride was committed now to the preliminary task of conquering her. He made sure it would not be difficult. Very gravely, but gently, he spoke.

"You read the papers? Then," as she bent her head in affirmation, "why did you make no remark upon them?"

"I had no remark to make," she replied quietly.

"Am I to conclude that you feel the injustice of your accusations against my father?"

Winifred tried to free her hand—failed—then burst out imploringly: "Let us not speak on the subject—you blame me, of course—how should you do otherwise? To you I simply seem prejudiced, ungrateful ——"

"Of gratitude I do not speak. But as to your being prejudiced, I should like to know who could deny it," interrupted Mark, with his grave smile. There was a dangerously tender light in his eyes, and he made a movement as if to draw her closer to him. In the faltering tones of her voice, the quick, dismayed turns of her head, in her evident distress and sorrow, she seemed to him very sweet and womanly. Another moment and she would yield. He would hold her in his arms and tell her that he loved her. But Winifred, although he would not have believed it, was still a long way off that complacent consummation. With a sudden effort, she wrenched herself free and cried out: "My determination is irrevocable. I regret my speech to your father, but I do not withdraw it."

Mark's brow darkened. Repulsed tenderness, wounded pride, and outraged affection began to raise a storm within him. Nevertheless he asked her quietly on what she based her convictions, listened in attentive silence to the story of her acquaintance with Miss Freake, of Clara Smythe's taunt, of Martha's ravings, and Ridgeley's dying statement. Very patiently and dispassionately he tried to make her see how little all these uncertain proofs amounted to: how certain it was that Miss Freake would protest her own innocence: how little meaning could be attached to her ravings: how likely it was that Ridgeley's pretended confession had had no other root than revenge for what he conceived to be a denial of his demands.

"You cannot be surprised if I am indignant at your accusations," continued Mark. "I should be more indignant, only ——" he paused, then added in an altered tone—"only that you are the accuser. But I do not despair of converting you. I hope that you will return with me to The Limes, and there hear from my father himself that your words have been buried in oblivion."

"No," said Winifred, and raised her head with an ominous flash of her eyes. She could not judge at this moment, but at least she could resist—and she would resist to the last. Mark rose.

"Consider what you lose by this refusal, Miss Power. The love of your friends and of your adopted father, the support of those who might be useful to you in your career, the esteem of everybody who, until to-day, had given you credit for intelligence and good feeling."

Winifred had winced at the allusion to Mr. Russell, for there Mark touched a chord of deep prophetic pain. But she answered steadily enough: "You confuse two problems. My duties towards my adopted parents are one thing; my relations towards Sir John Hatherley are another. All that I have at present to do is to break off every connection with—your father."

She spoke the last words in a lower voice, and wrung her hands together as she ended.

Mark stood silent, cruelly wounded. He took his hat and turned towards the door, finding nothing to reply that would not have betrayed the deep resentment which his pride urged him to conceal. But as he glanced back at Winifred and saw her standing there with the sunlight touching her golden head; as her eyes met his mournfully, and he noted that she trembled; then his love and her beauty spoke too strongly for anger, and he went eagerly to her side.

"Winifred—consider! Have you no fear of regret?"

It was the first time he had called her by her name, and the sound of it was sweeter than she had ever thought that human words could be. Regret? Yes, she knew that she would regret; her heart even now was full of pain. But what of that? A little happiness more or less in youth seems a small matter when the dazzling vistas of the world are scarce unfolded, and life offers treasures in specious abundance.

Winifred shut her heart to its own pleadings; she closed her ears to the meaning of Mark's tone, and turned away from the reluctant passion of his eyes as she whispered: "My resolution is irrevocable."

"Listen!" said the young man, and again took her hand. "I never thought to have patience in such a cause; but I feel that I cannot leave you thus. You are angry now, excited, strung up to a determination, and too proud to renounce it. I ask only one thing of you—not to speak your last word yet. Take a little while to consider before you break with us entirely—my dear."

There was a silence which, from all the emotion compressed into it, seemed very long to both of them. Mark clasped her hand closer, then, as she visibly shrank, released it and stood back very pale but mute. Winifred, feeling herself drifting, covered her face, and sank upon a chair. She must accord no delay, accept no compromise, or she was lost. That was her thought, but the words in which to say it would not come.

"I cannot change my mind. I—I am sorry to refuse it to you. But—after all—what does it matter if we part?" said she at last.

"It matters very much to me," answered Mark bitterly and proudly. "But of course if your decision be final, I must cease to combat it. Is it final?"

"Yes," breathed Winifred softly. She listened quite curiously to her own voice as she said it, and was listening still after Mark had traversed the room with a rapid step and closed the door behind him.

On realising that she was again alone, she rose with a commonplace air, and quite quietly and quickly set about cleaning her palette. She was satisfied with herself. She had done what she always intended to do whenever a crisis in her life presented itself: she had been true to her own principles. Supposing she had yielded and gone back to The Limes, forgetting Miss Freake and her wrongs, and taking the hand of Sir John in friendship, by this time she would already have begun to feel remorseful and ashamed. The pain she felt would be fleeting; in fact she thought it had already fled; but the joy of an approving conscience would endure. She nodded her head and smiled at her approving conscience, and then, all at once burst into tears!

Lost in a very passion of sobs, blind and deaf to everything around her, she was presently discovered by Mrs. Chandos-Fane, who began pouring forth a characteristic flood of consolation.

"I am surprised at your agitation, love, although I can understand that you begin to see the folly of your conduct. If you had consulted your poor mother before speaking last night, perhaps things might have been different. But I am accustomed to be considered a fool. Fortunately Mr. Burton —— I hear Mr. Mark Hatherley has been here. I suppose he was very angry?"

Winifred made no reply, only checked her sobs and dried her tears, mortified at having been discovered in such a state. But her mother's curiosity was not to be repressed.

"He is not what *I* call an agreeable young man, although I believe you think him intelligent, darling. For myself, I prefer good-breeding to intellect. I suppose he was very rude to you? Had I been present that might not have happened: but you gave me no hint of his coming. I suppose you preferred—well, no matter! But I never should have expected him to make you cry."

"He did not make me cry," retorted Winifred, too intensely irritated to consider whether her answer were strictly true.

"No?" said Mrs. Fane interrogatively. "Then, what is it? Nothing? Why, then, you must be hysterical, darling. I do not understand that sort of thing myself, but I never was morbid—never. You remember we are engaged to dine to-morrow at The Limes: shall you go?"

"Not I certainly," answered Winifred, somewhat unheroically. "I am not going to The Limes again."

Mrs. Fane looked as much surprised as if her daughter were affirming that Mr. Burton had turned dancing dervish. Her first anger of yesterday evaporated, she was quite incapable of regarding Winifred's conduct from a serious point of view. The notion of any real breach with Sir John—the potentate of the neighbourhood—

astounded her. She tried a little argument, not much; then passed to persuasion; and, this failing, relapsed into her usual self-laudatory strain of lamentation. Baffled in every attempt to shake Winifred's determination, she informed her that she was "a mule," and went up stairs to write a letter on her own account to Sir John. The letter was a masterpiece. It began by stating that her "sweet child had a feverish headache;" went on to say that "in all probability her keen maternal anxiety would not allow her to dine from home on the morrow; but perhaps dear Sir John would allow her to leave the question open."

This brought a very stately and forgiving epistle from the outraged master of The Limes. Sir John declared that he felt it incumbent upon his own dignity to leave Miss Power's conversion to her better sense and feeling; consequently he should never allude again to the extraordinary scene of the previous evening. At the same time, it must be understood that the first step towards burying it in oblivion could not come from himself. For the rest, with Mrs. Chandos-Fane he had no quarrel, and hoped never to have one. And he trusted that Miss Power would be sufficiently recovered to allow her mother to join the dinner-party at The Limes next day.

This magnanimous composition was brought, wonderful to relate, by Mrs. Hatherley herself. Her eyes still had that light of suppressed excitement and awakened curiosity which had come into them the night before. She did not say much, but sat and looked at Winifred with a speechless inquisitiveness, almost like a monkey's, until the girl began to find her presence positively uncanny. All at once, in the midst of Mrs. Fane's protestations of profound emotion at Sir John's generosity, the little creole suddenly asked: "Did Miss Power know many people who had been acquainted with Sir John in his young days?"

The malignant curiosity manifest in this question so scandalised Mrs. Fane that she hastily interposed, saying that her darling daughter had led a most secluded life, and had, she regretted to say, a very limited and insufficient knowledge of the world.

"Well, that must be your fault," placidly remarked Mrs. Hatherley.

"My fault?" Mrs. Fane gasped. Mrs. Hatherley was sometimes so very impertinent!

"You let her be brought up by strangers."

"Strangers?" An insulted hidalgo might have envied the tone in which Mrs. Fane repeated the word. "I am not aware that my dear, my only brother, a hopeless invalid, can be considered a stranger. He has been unfortunate, that is true; disappointed of a baronetcy and deprived by circumstances of his fortune: and he and his wife are childless. When he asked for my child to fill the void of their existence, was I to deny her to him? Was I ——"

"Dear me! I don't know what you were to do, I am sure," interrupted Mrs. Hatherley in a tone of peevish indifference, and with

her watchful marmoset-like eyes still fixed on Winifred. But the flood-gates of Mrs. Fane's eloquence once opened were not so easily closed again, and the West Indian had to listen to a torrent of words, which were possibly intended as much to baffle her curiosity as to relieve the speaker's feelings. Fairly beaten at last, she rose in a ruffled condition and trundled herself and her wraps away, with all her unanswered questions in her.

Days lengthened into weeks. And while Winifred busied herself with the preparations for her mother's wedding, the breach between herself and Sir John remained unhealed. Mark was almost constantly in London, and she hardly ever saw him, even in the street. Dolly's partisanship, chiefly expressed as it was by the nods and becks and wreathed smiles of a secret understanding, although droll, was not in the highest degree consolatory to Winifred. The neighbourhood aware, although without knowing why, that she was in Sir John's black books, looked a little askance at her: and she had to bear, in a general atmosphere of disapproval, the dreary monotony of days that succeed upon excitement.

CHAPTER XIV.

GERTRUDE PAYS A VISIT.

WHILE Winifred Power was reaping the meagre harvest of her heroism, Gertrude's course at The Limes grew daily more triumphant.

Little by little the sceptre of government passed from the feeble hands of Mrs. Hatherley into hers. Little by little she usurped altogether the sisters' prerogatives of waiting upon Sir John.

It must be confessed that, whether from the soothing influence of her presence, or whether, as more likely, from her dexterous avoidance of unnecessary trouble, Sir John was incomparably less exacting than of yore. He did not want so many things; he was not so often attacked by sickness; when attacked, his majestic irritation was less apparent. He kept Gertrude a good deal with him; made her write out the menus of his sumptuous dinners; and dictated to her his courtly notes.

She was initiated into nearly all the secrets of his occupations, and found them considerably less imposing than the outside world supposed. Sir John, in the midst of his tomes and his papers, passed a good deal of his time in sleep. "His distressing malady precluded him now from profound study. He lived with the treasures that he had amassed in the past." Gertrude listened very respectfully to this, and swept out afterwards upon the world with all the insolent consciousness of a knowledge that gave her the upper hand.

If she did not teach Dolly and Florence much (and, indeed, Sir John's demands made that almost impossible), she persecuted them a good deal in numberless microscopic ways. She made them fetch and carry for her, with a deliberate, disdainful obtuseness to their signs of revolt. She crushed them with her beauty, her elegance and her cleverness a hundred times a day.

By the servants she was, of course, detested as an upstart; but she governed them with a steel hand in a velvet glove, and they dared not protest. With Mark she got on admirably. In spite of her loveliness, she stirred no fibre of passion in him, and she was wise and keen enough to find that out from the first. Abandoning all thought of subjugating him, she met him on the grounds of a frankness and a shrewdness which enchanted him. He considered her a "managing woman," but the least obnoxious specimen of the race that he had ever met. It was this power of being all things to all men that ensured Gertrude's success. She was a syren in the library, and a housekeeper out of it.

Mark's blindness drove his aunt and her daughters to despair.

"She is a *viper!*" exclaimed Mrs. Hatherley, with unwonted energy, one afternoon when she was very much awake.

"A cross, disagreeable thing," said Dorothy.

"And thinks nobody can do aught but herself," added Florence.

Mark, installed in an arm-chair, with a book in his hand, looked up from his reading with lifted eyebrows. The finer shades of misconduct easily discoverable by the female mind, naturally escaped his masculine perception: and he was genuinely amazed at the outburst which had greeted his ears.

"I believe her to be a mere adventuress," resumed Mrs. Hatherley, encouraged by Mark's signs of attention.

"She is half her time in bed—or in her room."

"And tells such *shocking* stories."

"Pray go on," said their hearer, surveying them with an exasperating smile of incredulity. "I am lost in admiration of your descriptive powers. Unaided, I should never have awakened to the harm in Miss Dallas. She is handsome and clever; always in a good humour; hard-working ——"

"*What?*" shrieked the trio in concert. "A horrid, ill-tempered, designing, grasping ——"

"I say, that's enough," interrupted Mark, rather roughly. "If there is one thing I do thoroughly detest it is the abusive chatter of women. Especially where it is not deserved."

Upon which Mrs. Hatherley sank back with a martyred moan; Flossie began to whimper; Dolly tossed her head in triumph at her secret resolutions.

After five minutes or so of indignant silence had reigned, the door opened and Gertrude herself entered, with an air of most provoking loveliness.

"I am going up to London," said the apple of discord, sweetly. "Can I do anything for anybody?"

This obliging question was met for the most part with frozen contempt. Only Mark spoke:

"You are very kind. But shall I not accompany you?"

"To Marshall and Snelgrove's? I would not impose such a sacrifice for the world."

"It would be a pleasure."

"Mark! And if I stop even to *look* at a shop-window you are as cross as you can be," exclaimed Florence, resentfully.

"That is a different thing," was the reply, delivered with supreme candour.

"No, indeed, it is not different," interposed Gertrude. "You are very, *very* kind, Mr. Hatherley, but I really must insist upon going by myself." And with a parting glance of gratitude, she went, saying under her breath, as she closed the door: "How furious they were! And how little he knows what a nuisance he would have been!"

Messrs. Marshall and Snelgrove had apparently changed their place of business; for Miss Dallas no sooner reached London than she took a cab and had herself driven to the north end of the town.

On reaching a very shabby street in a very dingy suburb she showed some surprise.

"Are you sure that this is Araminta Grove?" she inquired, first of the cabman, and then of a passer-by. Assured by both that there was no mistake, she shrugged her shoulders, paid her fare, and knocked at No. 12. There was no answer for some minutes, but a second and more impatient summons brought an untidy looking maiden to the door.

"Is Colonel Quince at home?"

"No; but he'd very likely not be long," was the impression of the maiden, stated with as much expedition as her extreme astonishment at Gertrude's appearance would allow.

"Then I will wait," said Miss Dallas: and she was shown into a sordid little sitting-room, which did not help to restore her good-humour. And when, at the end of half-an-hour, the door opened and a gentleman swaggered in, her only greeting was: "At last! I suppose you forgot that I was coming."

"By no means, my child," replied Colonel Quince, calmly. He removed his hat, pulled down his shirt-cuffs with an air of dandy elegance, and seated himself opposite his fair, incensed visitor.

"Any news?" he inquired.

"None," said Gertrude, curtly. "I believe you sent me on a wild-goose chase."

"What, no papers? No skeleton in the closet?"

"Nothing, I tell you."

Colonel Quince looked grave.

"Old fellow coming on at all?" he presently resumed.

"I don't know what you mean," replied Gertrude, grandly, but she coloured. Apparently she detected an exasperating flicker of incredulity in his eyes, for she continued with obvious irritation: "If you would drop your mysteries for once, and talk in something clearer than riddles, we might reach a definite result. But I believe you have been fooling me, from first to last."

"Not I," said the Colonel.

She made an impatient movement. "Why cannot you speak out?"

"Caution forbids it, madam. I know your sex. Sieves."

"A profound observation!" remarked Gertrude, with ironical gravity. "But since you will tell me nothing else, perhaps you will explain the change in your circumstances."

"My circumstances?" Colonel Quince quite chuckled. "That's a good one. Do you allude to the change in my abode?"

"Of course I do. The last time I saw you, you were in expensive lodgings at the West End."

"And now I have altered my latitude. A mere vicissitude of fortune, my dear. It is plain you have not known me long."

"No, but I have heard of you long enough," replied Gertrude, with slow scorn, as she regarded him. He was very well dressed, but indescribably dissipated in appearance, and had that air of "seedy" shrewdness which belongs to unsuccessful adventurers. For the rest, he was rather a handsome man still, and looked as if he might once have been a gentleman. He took her scrutiny with perfect composure, for there was an odd kind of familiarity between them that yet had no trace of affection. Nevertheless when, after some more conversation, Gertrude put out her little gloved hand in farewell, he held it in his own with a certain sort of friendliness and patronage.

"I should not like you, for your own credit, to make a failure of things down there. Have you laid siege to the son?"

"To Mark? No. Nor ever shall." She shook her head decidedly as she spoke, for some loyalty she still had, and she more than suspected Winifred Power's feelings. But this was not a reason to be confessed to her present companion. Bassesse oblige as well as noblesse, and Colonel Quince, as she knew by experience, was wont to stigmatise scruples as melodramatic.

"Won't rise to the bait, I suppose," he remarked, with a malicious smile. "Well, good-bye, my child; I must not complain of your keeping your secrets, if I keep mine, I suppose. Only remember this: if you are able to find out anything of that matter, you must inform me at once: I am your confederate."

Gertrude winced. The suggestion of such a partnership was not pleasant; although to her love of excitement and perverted romanticism, an intrigue in which even Colonel Quince played a part was better than no intrigue at all. She absolutely hugged the thought that while Mrs. Hatherley and her daughters were sipping their afternoon tea in the luxurious drawing-room at The Limes; while Winifred

was making the most of the fading daylight for her picture; and Mrs. Chandos-Fane was absorbed in the cut of a skirt, or the trimming of a bonnet; she, contemptuous of dull respectability and commonplace effort, was paying a clandestine visit to a disreputable individual in his shabby lodgings in Kentish Town.

"I suppose you have not a spare half-sovereign?" inquired Colonel Quince at parting.

"How should I have? You know I receive no salary and the only money I ever get is from poor Dick—that is, at present," Gertrude hastened to add. "But I have not forgotten that my first respectable appearance at The Limes was entirely owing to you."

"And is Dick hard-up?"

"Perhaps not quite so much so as usual just now. But I don't know where he gets his money."

"There are ways." And Colonel Quince waved his hand vaguely towards limitless horizons.

"Whatever Dick's ways may be, I am quite sure they are honest," answered Dick's sister, flushing up hotly as if in answer to an unspoken accusation. Then, half ashamed at this one little touch of nature in herself; angry, too, at the dawning mockery in her companion's face, she turned away abruptly and with a curt "good-bye," ran down the narrow stair.

As Gertrude hurried through the fog and drizzle of the winter day, and met the sons and daughters of toil—poor workmen, jaded milliners, pallid daily teachers—plodding wearily homewards under the lately-lighted lamps, a great contempt for them rose within her. How much cleverer was she! how much more intrepid! how much surer of success! The precise nature of the destiny which she was to carve out for herself she could not have told if asked; only she was determined that it should be as unlike as possible to the sordid greyness of ordinary existence.

An intense belief in herself made her personality a potent one. With those whom she chose to conciliate, she interested by a sphinx-like air of keeping back the true secrets of her nature: and a certain intellectual power enabled her to rise superior to the smaller arts and paltrier motives of the ordinary adventurers. She had a wayward kind of generosity; a fitful sort of incomplete nobility; and all the lavishness of a character which thoroughly despises work. In the best of her dreaming she had ideas that were not wholly selfish. She meant to do a great deal for her family—when she should have succeeded in achieving a position for herself. That would be the moment of her greatest triumph; and her own people who had been so ready, as she thought, to despise her would then render her a tardy, but not less welcome, justice. On dispassionate consideration she concluded that misconduct was inferior policy; consequently she decided to be virtuous, and to use virtue as one of the weapons in her armoury.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MISSING PSALTER.

THE time for Mrs. Fane's wedding had now drawn near, and Mr. Burton had settled with an old college friend to come down to perform the ceremony.

"He is a very good fellow, is Archer," he said one day to Sir John. "And, by-the-bye, he is a great bibliophile. He will be enchanted with your collection; especially, I think, with the Psalter—the gold on a purple ground—that cost you such a sum. I doubt if even he has anything like it."

Mrs. Fane's pleasure in the arrangements for her wedding was poisoned by the thought that the people of The Limes would not be among the guests. She had, indeed, at one time nourished the dream of a wedding-breakfast at the great house; and had gently hinted as much to Sir John. But he, for all his amiability, had not only turned a deaf ear, but had declined, for himself, and his family, the invitation to the ceremony which the bride and bridegroom elect had not failed to despatch him.

"It is all your fault, darling; but I do not reproach you; I say nothing," said Mrs. Chandos-Fane to her pale and silent daughter. "I am aware that the neighbourhood will think it very strange—very. No doubt it will even be said that I have given Sir John grounds of just complaint against me."

"You can assure your acquaintances that it is all my fault," replied Winifred.

Mrs. Fane looked extremely offended.

"I am not treacherous, love. Neither treacherous nor selfish. I think I may say that nobody has ever accused me of such defects. Although I have not always been done full justice to, perhaps, in my own family (I may be mistaken, but I fancy sometimes this is the case), I can without excessive vanity lay claim to having had more friends than enemies. Nobody has ever found me unamiable or mean. And I should not think of justifying myself in the eyes of the neighbourhood at the expense of my child."

"I am sure I had far rather you would tell everybody the truth, than say so much on the subject to me," answered Winifred, more wearily than wisely.

Upon which Mrs. Fane, after a little pause of mournful astonishment, informed her that her temper was growing every day more unbearable; that the hour might come when she would be sorry for having treated her poor mother in such a way; but that for the rest, Mrs. Fane's patience was equal to most trials. She was thankful, after having suffered so much, to think that whatever Mr. Burton's faults might be—and she did not consider him perfect—his sympathy, at any rate, would never fail her.

How pretty and how marvellously young Mrs. Chandos-Fane looked on her wedding-day! It was the universal remark. In her elegant costume, with her petite figure, her golden fringe, her dainty manner, and winning smiles, she made a striking contrast to her tall and stately and grave-looking daughter.

The wedding was a brilliant affair in spite of the absence of the Hatherleys, and Mr. Burton seemed becomingly conscious that he was quite a subject for congratulation and envy.

Mrs. Burton and her daughter parted with tears. "I shall miss you," said poor Winifred, with genuine feeling.

"I am sure you will," replied her mother, with no less sincere belief. "Had my feelings ever been consulted at any time by anybody, we should not have separated. But it is useless to go back upon the unfortunate past. (Take care of my bonnet, love.) Our honeymoon will not last long, for my husband's sacred duties—duties in which I shall, I hope, fully share—will soon recall him.—I declare there's a button off my glove!"

This painful discovery abruptly arrested the flow of the bride's eloquence, and Winifred said gently, "Once I am in Paris, I shall probably not leave again for some time."

Mrs. Burton replied that she was aware of that. She knew that her dear daughter always preferred to be away from her. Nevertheless, she might one day discover that a mother's arms were a welcome refuge, and when that day dawned, Mrs. Burton would be happy to receive her. With this final assurance, a kiss, and an admonition not to tread upon her train, the little lady took her husband's arm, nodded graciously to everybody, stepped into her carriage, and, amid a shower of rice and of slippers, was triumphantly driven away.

Winifred, left all alone, had received several invitations to stay, at least for one night, with people in the neighbourhood. But she had declined them—thus earning for herself some reputation for eccentricity. The truth was, that her chief desire now was to escape from Elmsleigh and its associations. Once free of them, she hoped she should be able to cast off the regret that, day and night, since her interview with Mark had tugged at her heart-strings.

She had not found it easy, as she had anticipated, to do without positive happiness. Duty and hard work; art and an approving conscience; these had once appeared to her abundant materials out of which to compose a rich and satisfactory existence.

But it was strange how meagre and insufficient the result appeared, now that she had really undertaken the task. Duty looked remarkably angular; work was singularly barren; and art had lost half its flavour. After having deliberately driven Mark away, with all the unreason of a woman in love, she was piqued at his continued absence. And having finally reached the point of persuading herself that he had never really cared for her at all, she became more than ever anxious to quit the scene of her struggles and her humiliations.

Sitting alone in the little drawing-room, so lately full of guests, all grateful for the silence as she was, she felt pathetically lonely. She had made up her mind to start without delay for Paris, had put forward her preparations: and now that her departure seemed imminent, a hundred problems presented themselves.

She could not disguise from herself that if she severed her life from Sir John, the obligation of separating from Mrs. Russell was no whit less potent. In the first glow of her resolution, even that had seemed easy—or, at least, easier than to accept longer any share in Sir John's bounty. But now, in the rush of new-born longing for the love and sympathy that she had despised, her heart was wrung at the thought of parting from Mr. Russell.

"A telegram, miss," said a servant, rousing her from her mournful meditations.

With a quick prescience of evil, she tore it open and read: "Come at once. Your uncle is worse and wishes for you. Mary Russell."

Winifred's arms fell to her side. Was this the answer to all her doubts? Had death taken upon itself to solve her problems?

Awakened fully again to action, she hurried up stairs, and resumed her half-completed preparations for departure. In the midst of them, she was called downstairs again: "Miss Dallas wished to see her."

This was the first messenger to herself from The Limes that had crossed the doors for three weeks; and Winifred went down with a beating heart to receive her visitor.

"We have also had a telegram," said Gertrude, coming forward to meet her with her usual cool grace. "The man said he had left another here. And as I guessed that you would be starting immediately, I thought I might as well come round to say good-bye. Mark—Mr. Hatherley, I mean—sends you this letter."

Mark! It was a mere accident that Gertrude called him by his Christian name, and yet the familiarity from her struck coldly on Winifred's heart. It was equally an accident, although this also she could not know, that Gertrude had been the bearer of the letter. Mark had gone to London early in the morning, and before leaving had given it to a servant to deliver. The servant had forgotten it until the moment when Gertrude herself was starting to pay her visit. She had then seen it in his hand and offered to take it. All this she never thought of explaining, any more than it occurred to her to say that Mark knew nothing of the telegram, and had written his letter hours before it arrived.

Doing her best to hide all agitation from Gertrude's penetrating eyes, Winifred opened the letter.

"My Dear Miss Power,—Your silence and your absence during the past three weeks lead me to the reluctant conclusion that your resolution is unaltered. I must deplore this fact, but I cannot, of course, again contest it. All I wish to say is that, much as I

must continue to differ with you in regard to Miss Freake, I still cannot deny to that unfortunate lady the pity due to her from me as a monomaniac and a kinswoman of my own. And I should consequently wish you to use for her benefit, if necessary, the cheque which I enclose. I know that she is old and poor, and these facts, with the other attendant circumstances, constitute a claim upon my help. If at any time she needs further pecuniary assistance, be kind enough to apply to me. "Yours truly,

"MARK HATHERLEY."

That was all. A cold offer of money, tantamount to a final farewell to herself! This was how Winifred read the letter, helped to her conclusion by the contrast between Mark's indifferent tone and her own present state of agitated sorrow; by the irritation of Gertrude's presence and her watchful glance; and by the unreasonable conviction that Mark had chosen the moment of her grief, to emphasise his cold disapproval of her conduct. Very foolish and unjust of Winifred! But secret struggles, unspoken love and unshared broodings are very morbid counsellors, and for so many days now she had borne unaided the triple burden of her thoughts.

In reply, she wrote:

"If my partisanship of Martha Freake constitute an injustice on my part towards her kinsfolk, then it is not fair that I should be the dispenser of their generosity. I doubt if she would accept your bounty. But should she at any time be so inclined, it will be fitter that she should ask you for it herself."

She signed this letter, enclosed the cheque in it, and handed it in silence to Gertrude.

"I hope you have not written anything foolish?" said that young lady, with her usual penetration.

"I have written as I thought best," was the cold reply.

Gertrude twisted the letter about, still keeping her eyes fixed on her companion.

"I cannot help thinking, Winifred, that you are making rather a mess of your affairs," she resumed, with the air of dispassionate common-sense which she had inherited from her father, and which Mr. Dallas and his daughter alike put forth when considering other people's business.

"You must allow me to be the best judge of that question," Winifred answered, gently, still bent on keeping her at arms' length from all her quivering wounds.

Gertrude looked disappointed. She had come, impelled partly by a survival of affection for her friend, partly by a characteristic conviction of her own superiority in all practical matters, partly to make Winifred speak; and then, as she would have expressed it, "to set things straight." But against this impassive and obstinate reserve she could do nothing; so with a shrug of her shoulders, she changed the subject.

"I want principally to speak to you about Dolly. It seems she actually wishes to go with you to Paris. She took me aside, and, with a portentous air of mystery and heroism, announced her doughty determination. You have 'made a school,' Winifred, as the French say. All the young ladies in the place will soon be wanting to beinde pendent and unconventional," concluded Gertrude, with her easy impertinence.

Winifred looked at her, not unamused. It was comic indeed to hear Miss Dallas express herself in this tone of impartial criticism.

"She said she could not stand Florence any longer; and she hinted, with as much clearness as her somewhat rudimentary ideas of politeness would allow, that she was not precisely devoted to me," continued Gertrude, with a light laugh. "She added that she was no longer wanted at The Limes (I wonder if she really believes she ever *was* wanted); she asked me to intercede for her with Sir John, and was good enough to express the flattering conviction that I was more likely than anybody else to obtain his consent."

"Of course you denied this?" said Winifred. She could not have helped the little sarcasm for the world.

"No," replied Gertrude placidly, "I quite agreed with her. If I had not been afraid of hurting her feelings, I might have added that an intercessor is superfluous when a prayer is welcome. As a matter of fact, Sir John seems extremely pleased at the notion of letting Dorothy go."

"And Mrs. Hatherley?"

"Mrs. Hatherley weeps. But what of that?"

"Gertrude!" Winifred looked reproof, and Gertrude—laughed.

"Dolly must follow me," mused Winifred. "I will see, as soon as I can, what arrangements can be made for her."

"I wish I knew if Sir John really intends to provide handsomely for his nieces," observed Gertrude as she rose to go.

"Why?"

"Because in that case, Dolly's idea of going to Paris might turn up trumps for Dick."

"Gerty," exclaimed Winifred, "you seem really fond of Dick. Why are you fond of nobody else?"

Quite suddenly, to Winifred's intense amazement, the tears rushed to Gertrude's eyes.

"Why are almost all lives a failure?" she said bitterly. "You are a good creature, Winifred. Are you happy yourself?"

And without a word of farewell, she turned and left her.

As Miss Dallas re-entered the hall of The Limes, she was conscious of a certain unusual stir. The servants looked a little grave, while from the open door of the library issued the sound of voices in high discourse. Made aware in some way of her return, Dorothy and her sister came tumbling out upon her like a pair of eager young seals.

"Oh, Miss Dallas!" cried both in a breath. "What do you think has happened? The beautiful Psalter has been stolen!"

"Stolen?—the Psalter?" exclaimed Gertrude. "Impossible! Who would steal it?"

"That is what we are all asking," said Florence. "Mr. Archer came round to look at the books. And when my uncle took out the Psalter case, he found it empty."

At this moment Mrs. Hatherley appeared, coming out of the library with her usual stealthy tread. "Sir John would be glad to see you, Miss Dallas. He is in consternation at his loss."

There was a slight but perceptible sneer in her tone, as though she would insinuate that Sir John thought nobody could bring him consolation but the governess. Gertrude hurried into the library. The master of it was sitting in his usual chair, his brow resting on his hand. Beside him on the table lay the case open and empty. Mr. Archer, flushed and fussy, sat talking eagerly, first to one person, then to another; while Mark, just home from London, stood upright in front of the fire, listening with a grave air of concern.

"It is really the most inconceivable thing!" cried Mr. Archer. "You are certain that nobody but yourself has the key of the case?"

"As certain as that I sit here," answered Sir John.

"And do you always keep it by you?"

"In the daytime it is in my pocket. At night it lies on a table beside my bed, in company with my watch and other keys."

"And you never leave it about?"

Sir John reflected. "Perhaps I may have done so once or twice of late. As a rule I am very careful."

Mr. Archer was not satisfied. He evidently considered that he had a turn for detection.

"Have there been any strangers, inmates, in the house of late?"

"Nobody but Mr. Dallas," put in Mrs. Hatherley softly.

"*Mamma!*" exclaimed the incautious Dolly, indignantly making manifest the hidden point of her mother's observation.

"And who was he?" briskly inquired Mr. Archer.

"Hush!" interrupted Mark, with a concerned glance at Gertrude.

"Mr. Dallas was a most estimable young man, for a time my secretary, and this lady's brother.—Mr. Archer—Miss Dallas." Sir John performed the introduction with a bland severity full of majestic reproof. Mr. Archer sprang up, bowed, turned very red and glanced testily at Mrs. Hatherley. What had the woman meant by her interruption? Between embarrassment and surprised admiration of Gertrude's beauty, he was speechless.

She fixed her splendid eyes upon him with a sad serenity, which completed his discomfiture, and swept slowly to a seat beside Sir John. Her whole air implied security, and, it might almost be said, possession. The master of the house turned towards her with even more than his usual suavity and laid his hand on her arm.

"Yours is the best head of all. You must help us to find the thief."

"Perhaps it would be as well, for poor Dick's sake, to explain to Mr. Archer why he stayed with you so short a time," said Gertrude: "and also that it is some time since he went away."

"I beg—I never meant—that is, I did not think—not necessary at all," stammered Mr. Archer, overwhelmed.

"Miss Dallas is quite right. Now I think of it I never exactly understood myself why Mr. Dallas did not remain longer with you, sir," said Mark, good-naturedly anxious to put everybody at ease.

"He went in the first instance to buy books for me at the Hague —that I think you all know. He did not come back to me, first, because he had some chance of employment there; and next, because his sister's—this young lady's—intelligence and zeal enabled her to undertake the completion of the task which he had begun," explained Sir John.

"But Mr. Dallas did not obtain that employment at the Hague," remarked Mrs. Hatherley, with an air of merely contributing her small quota to the general stock of information.

"No. He returned to Paris," said Gertrude curtly.

"Can you recollect how long it is since you last saw or handled the Psalter?" inquired Mr Archer, perseveringly resuming the subject of the loss.

"I should say about two months. You can remember, perhaps?" added Sir John, turning to Gertrude. "It was the morning when I explained to you some peculiarities in the illuminations. We were speaking of the figure of January—represented by an old man sitting beside a fire."

"I remember. My brother was still here: I am not sure but he was in the room. Just at the moment Mrs. Hatherley came in with the telegram announcing her son's illness," spoke the governess promptly.

"Then it was the *very* day before Mr. Dallas left," exclaimed Mrs. Hatherley, swift as thought. But she quivered and turned pale; no one saw why: but the least allusion to her son always agitated her singularly.

"I recall every circumstance now," resumed Sir John. "You wanted money for your journey, Laura: you were going up in answer to the telegram. I went upstairs to get it, taking my keys with me. Miss Dallas left the library and you remained behind alone. When I returned I found that you had returned the Psalter to its case, and replaced it on the usual shelf. I then locked the book-case, as is my invariable habit."

"After looking to see if the Psalter were in the case?" Decidedly some imp of perverse speech had hold of Mr. Archer's tongue that day! He spoke impulsively, without thought of malice, then turned hot all over. Reflecting on the matter later, he could only account for

his preposterous question by an indescribable something in Sir John's voice which had seemed to him to suggest it.

"My sister-in-law had previously locked the Psalter-case, and she gave me the key on my return. You never left the room during my absence, did you, Laura?" asked Sir John, quietly turning to her.

"Of course I did not," she replied, almost hysterically. "I am sure I don't know what possessed me to put away the thing, or to touch it at all. Perhaps you would like to cross-question the children next?" Indicating her daughters with a gesture, she rose, trembling and livid with rage, and turned towards the door. Mr. Archer was too repentant even to attempt an apology. He sat staring straight in front of him, like a man distraught, while Flossie heaped coals of fire on his head by taking her usual refuge in tears.

"Come back, aunt," interposed Mark with kindly peremptoriness, striding across the room and arresting Mrs. Hatherley's departure. "Sit down and talk quietly, can't you? And, Flossie, stop crying, there's a good child."

"How can you be such a goose?" confidentially asked Dolly of her sister, herself looking like a little fighting-cock the while.

"We are losing time," continued Mark. "Some measures ought to be taken immediately. What do you mean to do, father?"

Sir John did not answer. He had not seen the Psalter since that day.

"Advertise," suggested Gertrude. "The police ——"

"I will have nothing to do with the police," interrupted Sir John. "I have no opinion of them. They make a mess of everything."

Mark looked at him with a puzzled air. He had never heard him speak in that manner of the police. "Father, in this case it seems to me that our only chance of discovery lies with Scotland Yard."

"That may be your opinion, Mark. It is not mine. I hold that police interference would be either unnecessary or *inconvenient*," said Sir John, laying especial stress upon the last word.

"*Inconvenient?*" repeated Mark in astonishment.

"We will suppose," quietly continued his father, "that one of the servants is the thief. He will probably have an associate who acted as receiver. Both these people are ignorant, and can have but a vague idea of the value of a thirteenth-century psalter: in fact, probably only stole it in the hope that I should offer a reward for its recovery, knowing I value it. They would not know where or to whom to offer it for sale, all they want is to get the reward. In that case, by offering £20, I should get my Psalter again."

"And would you then compound with felony by allowing the interesting thieves to come off scot free?" asked Mark gaily.

"If a knowledge of their identity were positively forced upon me, I would proceed against them. They would be all the easier to catch for the previous silence and security."

"But my dear father, where would be the silence if you advertise?"

"I shall not advertise unless my other plan fails, Mark. After prayers this evening, when all the household is assembled, I shall announce my loss: and promise the £20, with no questions asked, to the person who brings me back the Psalter."

"Well, I must go or I shall be late for dinner," said Mr. Archer, all in a hurry. He had no patience with fantastic plans. Mark accompanied him to the hall door, and helped him on with his great-coat.

"Tell me," suddenly said the fussy old gentleman, "what did your father mean by saying that the action of the police might be 'inconvenient?'"

"The word perplexes me as much as it does you," replied Mark.

Mr. Archer laid a confidential finger on the young man's arm.

"I should keep a sharp eye on that handsome governess, if I were you. The 'brother at the Hague' has somehow an outlandish sound. Moreover, she has very much the upper hand of your father; and it strikes me that he suspects somebody whom he chooses to shield."

Mr. Archer nodded and disappeared into the fog. Mark turned away from the door thoughtfully. He quite started when he found Gertrude standing in the hall. Had she heard Mr. Archer's warning? Mark's chivalrous instincts revolted at the idea.

"Pardon me," she said, in her graceful way. "I have a letter for you—an answer from Winifred, to yours. Of course, she starts to-night."

The young man dropped his eyes to avoid her gaze. But he could not hide the red flush that mounted to his cheek; and the affected carelessness with which he took the letter did not deceive Gertrude's keen, but, in this instance, friendly glance.

She had the tact to leave him immediately, and he was hardly alone before he tore open the letter. He bit his lip when he saw the returned cheque, and his brow darkened as he read. A second rebuff from her! Well, he would not expose himself to a third. She did not care for him, and she must go. It did not strike Mark Hatherley that after all he had never been very explicit in the declaration of his feelings; but when did a shy, proud man, rather reluctantly in love moreover, ever yet fail to throw the whole burden of that discovery upon the woman?

He crushed the letter together, thrust it into his pocket, and marched upstairs to dress for dinner in a very gloomy mood. He was intensely irritated against Winifred, and when he wrested his thoughts from her, they had no more pleasant subject to fall back upon than the theft of the Psalter and his father's inexplicable behaviour. Mr. Archer's warning, giving voice as it did to certain vague suspicions of his own, not as to the Psalter but as to the governess, made him uneasy. He was too generous definitely to accuse Gertrude or anybody else, even in thought; but he had found

his father's manner peculiar, and could not help thinking that there was a mystery behind it.

The sense that he could not altogether comprehend Sir John often pained Mark. Scrupulously upright himself, he was loth to attribute insincerity to others, and especially to his father. Like everybody else, he had been taught to admire, consider, and revere him, and being just as single-hearted as he was practical-minded, he took upon trust, deliberately, as it were, those finer qualities of intellect in the sage man which he had been taught to believe existed. Nevertheless as his own character, so full of rectitude and earnestness, developed, he had found his father increasingly difficult to fathom; and not unrarely of late he had been startled by detecting in himself the heretical idea that possibly there was nothing to fathom after all! The conception of Sir John as essentially shallow presented itself indeed as the easiest solution of all perplexities; but from this abrupt destruction of the fetish of years, Mark strongly shrank.

Everybody, except Sir John the master, was absent-minded that evening at dinner. Before the servants of course nothing could be said of the stolen Psalter, but the thought of it was present in the mind of all. Mrs. Hatherley was extremely sulky, and had apparently been crying; Flossie looked scared; Dolly defiant; Gertrude excited. The scent of a mystery had intoxicated her already; she was wondering what would result to herself out of it all.

"Miss Power has started, I presume?" suddenly asked Sir John: and a movement, quickly repressed, of Mark's, showed that his mind had been turned in the same direction.

"Yes. Poor Winifred!" said Gertrude.

"You are very good to pity her," observed the master, stiffly.

"I pity her because she is so hot-headed," softly replied Miss Dallas.

"Then she will see your brother?" resumed Sir John.

"Of course." Gertrude looked up inquiringly as she answered—expecting some further remark; but none came. Dolly, who had turned a lively red at the mention of Dick, here put in officiously: "If you want anything taken to Mr. Dallas, Uncle John, you can give it to me when I go to Paris."

"I want nothing taken," was the reply, rather sharply uttered. "And I am not sure that I shall allow you to go to Paris."

Dolly's small "flower-like" face (a very round flower) lengthened considerably.

"You must let her go, sir, now that your consent has once been given," interposed Mark, kindly. "I might take her myself. I—I suppose either you or I ought to be near my aunt if her husband dies."

At the utterance of this unexceptionable sentiment, a glance of demure amusement brightened Gertrude's eyes.

The evening passed heavily; but not for that did Sir John ring the

bell any earlier than usual for prayers. He always read these himself, in a very solemn and refined manner: and on this occasion he was more impressive than ever.

All the servants, from the highest to the lowest, were present—that being the rule at The Limes. As Sir John read, or rather recited, his eyes wandered slowly over the kneeling groups; and Dolly, watching him furtively with a kind of fascination, wondered if this penetration were discovering the thief. Prayers over, everybody rose, and the housekeeper had already curtseyed and turned towards the door, her subordinates preparing to follow her, when Sir John, with a gesture of his hand, arrested the exodus.

"I have something to say to you all. Will you be good enough to remain," he said courteously. A little stir of respectful astonishment ensued; then everyone stood still.

"I wish," began the master, "to convey to the knowledge of my entire household an unpleasant incident which has just been discovered. I have lost one of my books—a very rare and old book which I kept in a locked case. The case is there, the volume is gone. I value it principally for associations superfluous to explain, and which—ah—some of you might fail to understand. I might, of course, put the matter immediately into the hands of the police, with the result—" here Sir John, amid a breathless silence, paused and let his glance wander slowly among his auditors—" with the result that the house would be searched from top to bottom. I am unwilling to put this slight upon you, and I would prefer never to know the truth, rather than impute a theft to any one of you. We will say, then, for the present that the book has not been stolen; only lost—mislaid, you know. Whoever finds it and brings it back to me shall receive a reward of £20."

The effect of these words upon the listeners was for the most part uniform. The majority simply stared; and, if appearances were to be trusted, showed all the curiosity and amazement of entire ignorance.

Only Kelly, the butler, looked a little nervous and startled. He stepped out of the group and turned towards Mrs. Hatherley, seeming anxious to catch her eye. But if his object were to appeal to her in any way, it was frustrated by her demeanour. For she sat quite motionless, pale and with angry eyes, glancing neither to the right nor to the left, and taking no notice of anybody.

Meanwhile, the housekeeper, having of course a pet aversion among her underlings, the kitchen maid, had fixed a terrific gaze upon this victim and seemed much disappointed at eliciting nothing.

But it behoved the housekeeper's responsible position to speak, so she respectfully asked what the missing book might be like. Sir John described it accurately—its size—appearance—nature: even its value.

"I should recommend a thorough search, sir," said Mrs. Heath.

"I will not have it," returned her master, briefly.

"Not at all?" interrupted Mark, in surprise.

"Not for the present.'

"Then, sir," said Mrs. Heath, after an uncomfortable and embarrassed pause, "I think we had better go. Mr. Kelly and me, we will talk the matter over."

"Do so." And Sir John bowed as suavely to his departing household, as though it had been a deputation and he Prime Minister.

"I don't think you will have gained much by that move, father," spoke Mark, half-impatiently, when the last servant had departed.

Sir John put the tips of his white fingers together and sat thinking. But he answered nothing.

The others stood about looking at one another, finding little to do, less to say; yet not liking to go to bed and so close the mystery for that night.

Suddenly there came a discreet tap at the door, and the timid faces of two of the servants presented themselves: the kitchen-maid and the under-housemaid. They stood in awkward silence, looking scared and timid.

"Have you anything to tell me?" inquired Sir John, condescendingly.

"If you please, sir," began the housemaid, "Mary, here, and me, we think, only we have not much liked to talk about it, that there is something very queer in the upper story of this house."

"Really, Susan?" rejoined their master, suppressing a smile. "Explain yourself."

"For some time past, sir, we have heard strange noises at night," continued Susan, her manner and voice most mysterious—and there she stopped.

"Noises?" repeated Sir John.

"They must be rats," interposed Mark.

"No, sir!" and Susan shook her head decidedly. "They are not rats. Rats don't give great yells, sir, and laugh out like mad people."

There was a moment's astonished silence. Mrs. Hatherley made so sudden a movement that she brought a book off the table with a great crash to the floor.

Sir John, with unwonted politeness, went over to pick it up for her. "Your teeth are chattering with cold," he said. "Why don't you draw nearer the fire?" But somehow his tone was alive with curiosity.

Mark, still incredulous, was accusing Susan of being subject to nightmare.

"But Mary heard the noises also, sir," she declared. And Mary, thus challenged, told a marvellous story. The noises were there, she said, and very frightful.

"We will go upstairs and have a look round," said Sir John. While everybody else appeared to be unbelieving, excited or scared, he, strangely enough, seemed positively pleased. There was quite an unusual briskness in his manner and tone; not a trace of invalid

languor left. He moved towards the door and they prepared to follow. Then all at once, with a sobbing wail of despair, Mrs. Hatherley threw herself in front of him and barred the way.

"John," she cried, terrified and imploring, "I entreat of you not to go."

"Why not?" questioned Sir John, sternly.

"There is no danger, mamma," urged Dolly.

"I never knew such a fuss about nothing," said Mark, amused.

Mrs. Hatherley shivered and moaned in a speechless piteous way, like a frightened animal. Her wraps had fallen from her. She stood cowering beneath her brother-in-law's eyes, cruel now: a slender, small, livid woman; the picture of abject supplication.

"I intreat of you not to go," she repeated: and a chorus of "Why not?" broke out.

"No, no!" she persisted, and wrung her hands.

"Let me pass," commanded Sir John, taking her by the wrist and putting her aside.

"You will find William there. He is ill; dying, perhaps. Oh John, forgive me!" And she sank on her knees in front of him.

Sir John gave a short laugh; it sounded to her one of mocking exultation. "I suspected as much," he said. "Then William shall be driven out like any other wretched intruder." And again he tried to push past her.

"To-morrow he shall go," cried the mother, clinging to him. "But not to-night, John; oh, not to-night! He is ill, I tell you; very ill."

She might as well have spoken to a rock.

Mark went over and raised her compassionately. "We will go and see what can be done," he said quietly. "After all, he cannot be punished; or you either. He has not committed any crime."

She began crying hysterically, a little comforted by his words, but incapable of reasoning. Evidently, terror of Sir John overpowered in her every other thought.

"How much longer is this farce to be continued?" demanded Sir John, in angry tones. "Mark—Laura—let me pass. The servants are to come with me upstairs."

The butler, as if in answer to this summons, suddenly appeared at the door. He had apparently been lurking in the hall, and looked rather pale and disturbed. The whole party then, though for the most part uninvited, proceeded up the warmly carpeted and lighted stairs to the dimmer and barer regions of the garret.

"Listen!" cried Susan, and raised her hand.

(To be continued.)

WILKINSON PROUT.

A Sketch.

By the Author of "Our Amateur Concert."

I HAVE known Wilkinson Prout ever since we were boys at the Greycoats' School. And our friendship has never flagged or cooled since; though I am now a steady-going, prosaic young fellow well on in my twenties and employed as a corresponding clerk to the firm of Bristow, Bradbury and Bayliss: while he, scorning such low and vulgar occupation, elected, some time since, to "live on his muse." I quote his own words here.

His words, however, are not quite justified by events. For his muse, transcendent female though she may be, has hitherto politely but resolutely declined to do anything towards supporting him: nay, to put even the smallest coin into his pocket. And were it not for a legacy left him by a deceased aunt (a legacy yielding just £100 a year), Wilkinson Prout could never have elected to live the life of lettered leisure so dear to his soul.

When, at eighteen years of age, he and I left school, his genius was but budding. He only resorted to his pen as an amusement, and meekly followed his father's commands, which placed him upon a high stool in the counting-house of Prout and Son, Sugar Brokers, of Mincing Lane. There he continued, growing more and more discontented with, and contemptuous of, his quill-driving and figure-adding, for five long years. At the end of that time he gave his feelings vent, told his father and elder brother that he was "meant for higher things," and cut the concern.

"Then you may starve!" roared old Prout. The old gentleman was angry and did not pause to choose his words. "If you throw away the opening I've given you, you may try to live on your Aunt Rebecca's hundred a year, for not a farthing will you ever have from me, now or hereafter—and not a farthing will your fool's scribbling ever bring you in."

So Wilkinson Prout left his father's house of business, took some dingy lodgings, and commenced forthwith to "give himself up," as he said, without other distractions or sordid employment, "to the voice within him!" At his request I took up my abode with him. Lodging together was cheaper for both of us. That is now a whole year ago.

Poor Wilkinson! I could not help admiring the ease and cheerfulness with which he gave up the luxuries, and even the comforts, he had been accustomed to when in the receipt of a good salary from his

father. I could but wonder why people cannot always gauge their own talents and abilities as well as their friends can do it for them.

Wilkinson Prout fully believed (and believes, for the matter of that,) himself to be on a level with our most popular writers, living and deceased. When first freed from the trammels of office-work, he sat writing day and night, and every evening I would be entertained with the result of that day's labour. After he had done reading to me, he would begin to talk. "You see," he would say, "I differ from other writers in one respect: I can do everything!" Here he would frown, and, leaning on his hand, gaze into the fire: "Poetry, prose, sketches of character, comic and pathetic writing, dramas, tragedies, all come equally easy to me. There is my difficulty! Which am I to take up with in real earnest? Upon which am I to expend all the life and fire of my genius?" To which, after a slight cough, I would answer: "Well, whichever goes down best with the editors, and publishers, and *those* people." A moody silence would follow this, and Wilkinson would gaze sternly into the coals. "Editors and publishers are fools!" would burst out then: "It's a well-known fact that *they* are the worst enemies a man of genius has!"

And, indeed, it seemed so—the latter statement, that is. I quite began to think they must be a terrible class of men from the way Wilkinson went on. Nothing, of all the countless productions in various styles, that he had sent to editors and publishers had ever been accepted! Not one of the dramas, tragedies, and farces that he had taken to managers had been favourably received: and one gentleman in the theatrical line had threatened proceedings if he was annoyed any more!

"Yes," Wilkinson Prout would say, "I can do everything! My difficulty with this embarras de richesses lies in the choosing. For instance now, Bob, here's a little thing I dashed off between the meat and pudding at my dinner to-day. Calculated, you know, to please the common mass of the people—for one must not always pass them over and ignore them. The sort of thing to suit a commonplace, inferior sort of intellect—like yours, old fellow. Listen. I call it:

FATE'S FATALITIES.

By an Unfortunate Young Man.

In my morning departure to town,
If my "brolly" I chance to forget,
You may "plank" every "quid," you may bet your own head
The weather will turn pouring wet!

If I have on a shocking bad hat,
And, per causâ, sneak down a back way,
My luck is so sweet, I'm certain to meet
Every creature I know on that day!

When at a "small early" I sing,
And hope to establish my fame,
Some lady will thank, and add "Mr. Blank
"Sang that charmingly *just ere you came!*"

One specimen more ere I close,
'Tis fortune's last dismallest frown,
If I e'er drop a nice and well-buttered slice,
It's certain to fall butter down!

"There! What d'you say to that?"

"Oh! Pretty well! Sounds something like a music-hall song, doesn't it?"

"Does it? Well, I don't know. However, I don't set much store by it. I only wanted to show you how versatile I am. Here's another thing I made, ten minutes after, in just the opposite style. I should like this set to music. Gounod's, I think, would be fairly suitable. It's called

NIGHT.

Come Night! Come awful Night! Oh! Night, come, come!
And wrap me in thine awful sable wings.
Come, with thy sightless eyes and voices dumb!
Come! Thou most awful of all awful things!

I stand amid the grievous twilight grey,
Waiting thee, Night; I gaze on yon pale star;
Reluctantly the twilight fades away,
'Tis you at last, Oh, Night—And there you are!

"What d'you think of that?"

"We—ell!—I suppose it's all right. But aren't there too many 'awfuls' in it?"

"Ha! Ha! It's no good asking your opinion, Robert Brett! And it's no good getting angry with you. If you've no literary tastes or talents, it's your failing, not your fault."

"Come, I say! You needn't be so rough on me! How does the three-volume novel get on?"

"Famously! To-day I wrote the great scene when the lovers finally part. Wait a bit! I'll get it in one second. Ah! Here it is! You remember where I left off, don't you?"

And then I was in for a hundred pages or so of MS.

I have given these poetical extracts from my friend's works just to let you find out his value for yourselves; also to show you what manner of man he was to lodge with. Whenever I was not engaged out, my evenings were passed hearing these choice productions read aloud. I regret that want of space prevents my quoting any of his more lengthy specimens of prose. There were other drawbacks, too, to one's comfort in sharing a roof-tree with Wilkinson Prout: though I do not intend to deny that the reading aloud was the chiefest annoyance.

We occupied the ground floor — consequently the hall-door was

rather near our sitting-room. In that hall-door was a letter-slit—he had had it enlarged to suit his purpose—through which the correspondence of the household tumbled on to the hall mat. A manuscript is generally rather a heavy thing. Need I say more? Wilkinson Prout wrote voluminously—and wrote unsuccessfully. The constant "thud" of rejected communications on a hall mat has an ominous and fearful sound, and is calculated to irritate and depress others besides the party most immediately concerned.

Another thorn in the flesh was that old Prout was in the habit of dashing up to our lodgings periodically in a hansom, and having a thorough set-to with Wilkinson in our parlour.

I like to have things nice and ornamental about me. Most of the little knick-knacks in the sitting-room were of my purchase; and old Prout never came without breaking at least *one* thing in the heat of his fury. Of course, he was always too angry and preoccupied to think of paying for the things he broke: besides, I expect he thought they were bought by Wilkinson, and consequently would be glad rather than otherwise.

It was one day, shortly before last Christmas, that I, returning home to Keppel Street in the evening from business, saw, with a sigh of resigned martyrdom, an empty hansom standing outside our house.

"Old Prout again!" I muttered vindictively. "Deuce take him!"

I entered. Yes! sure enough there were the voices raised high in dispute in the front parlour. Determined not to announce my presence and make a third at the quarrel, as I had sometimes been drawn into doing, I sneaked quietly into my bed-room, which was just behind the parlour and communicated with it by folding doors. I took off my top-coat, and sat patiently down to wait, thinking in my own heart, "After Christmas, catch me living with Wilkinson any longer!"

The battle in the next room raged briskly. "Will you listen to reason, you young fool? And take your place in the counting-house once more, before your mother breaks her heart?"

"I will not! My mother will not dream of breaking her heart because I choose to follow the monitions of my inward self. I tell you, father, once for all, business is repugnant to me. I wish to go forth a voice into the centuries?"

"I'm a precious good mind to make you go forth a voice into the street, and a pretty loud one too, by giving you a thorough thrashing!" returned old Prout, hardly able to speak for rage.

A silence, during which I could hear the breathing of the disputants quite audibly, and could fancy their mutual glares.

Old Prout was the first to speak again: "It isn't even as if you were earning anything by your beggarly craft," he said, "though I should consider it disgraceful then—but I know it for a fact that even in *this* grovelling pursuit you are uniformly unsuccessful!"

As if to confirm, illustrate and give point to this cruel speech there came at this moment a brisk postman's rap at the door, followed by the click of the letter-slit, and thud! thud! thud! thud! on the hall mat.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed the unfeeling father, as he heard the sounds and took in their meaning. "Wasn't I right? What's that come thumping into the hall but a lot of your returned rubbish?"

And then he went off ranting and raving, and I heard, with a groan, what I knew to be my precious little Worcester cup, knocked down and smashed. Presently he grew calmer again, and once more my ear caught his words, as I leaned my head wearily against the bed-room wall, and wondered when he'd go, and I should be able to get my tea. "It makes me mad," he was saying, "madder than ever to think of you, when I've so much to be proud of in your brother George."

"Ahem!" coughed Wilkinson.

"Yes—you may say 'ahem' as often as you please, but if you had half George's brains and nous, you'd be worth something!"

"Is George suddenly developed into a genius, then, sir? He was certainly not at all like one last time I saw him."

"A genius! What d'you mean by that impertinence? He's a clever man of business, and a good, steady fellow! He's a comfort to his mother and me, instead of a sorrow! And he's been engaged a week to Miss Benbanks, the heiress!"

There was a pause after the launching of this broadside, and then Wilkinson laughed slightly, and said: "I see, now, why George is so suddenly stuck upon a pedestal to be worshipped! So he's secured the great fortune, has he? I thought he'd try for her when I first heard she was staying with you down at the Court. Well, father, I don't envy him."

"No, of course you don't, because you're a fool! Of course there's nothing enviable in having secured a pretty, bright, clever young wife, with £5,000 a year, if she has a penny."

"Oh! If she's pretty and bright, that alters the case. I don't know her, you see, sir—and as to being a fool, as you've called me so often this afternoon ——"

Here his parent interrupted him and took up the tale: "I came to tell you this to shame you out of your miserably grovelling pursuits. For the last time, will you come back to your post in Mincing Lane?"

"For the last time, father, no! I am not at liberty to slight my inward promptings! I shall be an honoured man of letters! Vacancies are coming in the literary world. George Eliot is dead, and Tennyson is almost written out—I shall supply the place of both!" There was a slight pause; and then, gathering together his powers for the final smashing volley, Winkinson spoke these terrific words: "I'll tell you what, father. If I'm not left to follow my Art in peace—I'll turn Roman Catholic and lead a dissipated life!"

Old Prout was a staunch Dissenter: and a strict and puritanic wholesale dealer, to boot. He was evidently stunned by the overwhelming threat. For some seconds there was silence. Then I heard him take up his hat, make a hasty exit—the street-door banged, and the cab-wheels audibly rolled away.

Sometime after this visit, Wilkinson received a letter from his brother. It contained the news of that gentleman's speedily approaching nuptials: many lover-like mentions of "dearest Deborilla":—(Miss Benbank's Christian name), a hope that Wilkinson would spend the coming Christmas at Bilbury Court, and stay for the wedding, which was to take place the second week in January: and an invitation for myself to do the same.

Neither Wilkinson nor I had ever seen the bride-elect. But from him I learned that her father had been, in by-gone years, a city friend of old Prout; that he had migrated in the pursuit of his commercial career to the West Indies, while his daughter and only child was a mere baby; that he had lost his wife out there, and a little over a year ago had quitted this mortal stage himself, leaving the fair Deborilla, at three and twenty, the greatest heiress in Port L—.

The Benbanks had no near relatives; and on his death-bed, Paul Benbanks, who had for nearly twenty years kept up a desultory correspondence with his old friend Joshua Prout, managed to indite a feeble letter, asking that Deborilla might have a home—a temporary one, at least—at Bilbury Court, on her return to England; for he had expressed a wish that after his death she should return to her native country. He died a day or two later, and shortly afterwards Deborilla Benbanks sailed for England.

She was received at Bilbury Court with open arms: not *all* on account of her wealth, for they are kind-hearted people. But still they have the commercial knack of thinking there's nothing *quite* so nice as money. And, of course it *is* rather a different thing, receiving a disconsolate orphan with £5,000 a year into your house, from receiving the disconsolate orphan with nothing but the clothes she stands up in. However that may be, and not pausing to inquire too curiously into the feelings which animated Joshua Prout and his wife as they welcomed the heiress, to Bilbury Court she came; and there she had been living some six months.

"George has lost no time, anyhow," said Wilkinson. "Well, I don't grudge him his happiness and his heiress. I suppose I shall have to spend Christmas at the Court and stay for the wedding. Do you care to come, too?"

I said "Yes," and we spoke on the subject no more.

The time that intervened between the receipt of George Prout's letter and our departure for the Court was one of more mental activity than ever for Wilkinson. On my return from business I would find him almost smothered in manuscript.

There was no subject, it seemed, on which he did not touch. I

actually found a sheet of paper on the floor one morning, containing a poem headed, "To R—— B——" (my name is Robert Brett), and commencing, "Friend of my careless boyhood's hour, and friend of manhood's years." Just think of that! He must have exhausted every other theme before he lighted on *me!* I felt quite shy about it. I had no idea he liked me so much as the poem made out. Next time we met I was so polite to him that it was almost painful. I wanted to keep up the good opinion he evidently had of me. The evening of the day I found the poem, however, he called me a fool at tea because we had run out of butter; and I learned then that poets may love you very dearly in verse, and be uncommonly short with you in prose.

I was lucky enough to get more than a fortnight's holiday at Christmas; and, on the eve of that festival, Wilkinson and I set off for Bilbury Court. It is only about twelve miles from London; so half an hour's railway journey brought us to Dodstone station, whence one of the Prout chariots speedily conveyed us to the Court.

The dressing-bell was ringing when we got there, and, after a great scurry to change my things and get into dress-clothes, I descended to the drawing-room. There was a number of people in the great apartment. I looked round for the faces I knew.

"Hallo, Bob, old chap," said George Prout, as he spied me out. "Glad to see you. Wilkinson's come, I suppose?"

I said he would no doubt be down directly, and George straightway cantered me off to a sofa near one of the fire-places, on which were seated Mrs. Prout and a fair-haired young lady with bright, brown eyes and an uncommonly pleasant face. Mrs. Prout welcomed me as kindly as ever, and George, then, with much pomp and circumstance, presented me to the young lady, whom, of course, I had already guessed was Miss Benbanks.

"Well, Bob," cried old Prout, approaching the coterie. "You're very welcome, my boy, very welcome," and he grasped my hand heartily. "Have you been introduced to Miss Benbanks?—Ah! Of course!—George is only too anxious to bring everyone to the Court to envy him his luck."

"Mr. Prout! I won't be flattered so! Positively I *won't!*" cried the lively heiress. "George, if you allow me to hear such things said, I shall get perfectly intolerable!"

"I'm not afraid," said George. "I know you better than you know yourself, Deborilla."

The lovers continued this tender theme in a low voice, and old Prout nudged me rather more than I cared about, and watched them with a complacency I found a trifle offensive. I therefore moved away.

At this moment Wilkinson entered the room. He was not looking his best—and at his best he was really a good-looking, well-made, presentable fellow. His hair had the appearance of having been arranged with his fingers. His face was of a somewhat messy pallor.

His legs, I thought, looked shorter then usual, as he advanced up the apartment, glancing about him half-indifferently, half-shyly. His father caught sight of him. "Here he is! Here's the rising poet!" cried the old man, and I was really angry with him for it. "Come a little faster, man! Is there anything wrong with your legs? Let me present you!" continued the old gentleman. "Miss Deborilla Benbanks, will you let me introduce to you a young man who gave up a good situation in order to scribble nonsense and starve? This, my dear girl, is Joshua Wilkinson Prout—the fool of his family."

"Father," muttered Wilkinson, colouring angrily as he bowed, "It's a great deal too bad of you."

Miss Benbanks was very gracious: told Wilkinson she knew how fond his father was of joking: said she was delighted to know one she had heard so much about; and hoped, in a lower voice, that he would let her read some of his poetry and novels very soon.

"Thank you very much, dear, for being so kind to him." I heard the tender George say to his fiancée, as we went in to dinner. "Poor Wilkinson is very queer, of course, but I was going to ask you to be as kind to him as you could."

There were several guests staying in the house, besides a few people from the neighbourhood come to dine. Of the latter was a Miss Judd, who fell to me to take in. She was about forty, with a fringe, a silk dress that showed her ankles, and rather more rouge on one cheek than on the other. She had been invited, I supposed, solely in her character of neighbour, for I thought the old Prouts looked askance at her youthful decorations. She asked me so many questions at dinner that I got quite bewildered.

Finding me, I suppose, a trifle stolid and slow, she turned to her other neighbour, Walter Sharpe, a cousin of the Prouts, whom I had often met at the Court, and a bit of a wag. Him she plied with a similar torrent of questions to that with which she had overwhelmed me. At last I heard him say: "Oh! Miss Judd, I'm so hungry now! Would you mind writing down a list of your questions, and I'll let you have the answers to-morrow?"

We had to get through the evening as best we could. No dancing was countenanced at Bilbury Court. Miss Judd confided to Walter Sharpe and me that she thought it was "an awful shame." In households where this prejudice against dancing exists, the place of that amusement is taken by various terrible penances called games. In one room you would come upon a group of blighted beings playing Dumb-Crambo, or mortifying themselves with a dreary and frightful sport called by the initiated "Clumps."

I stumbled on Wilkinson in a state of collapse, waiting outside the drawing-room door. He said it was a game they were playing inside, and he had been sent out "to think of something." He had very ittle idea of what the game meant; he had been in the hall fifteen

minutes already, and his mind was still a perfect blank; so, taking his arm, I went in with him and we found they had forgotten all about that game and were playing something else.

There were some feeble charades, in which several people twined antimacassars round their heads and looked foolish. There was also an attempt made at "Proverbs," started by Miss Judd. "What shall the proverb be?" asked the elderly coquette of Walter Sharpe, when some unfortunate creature had been driven out to perish in the hall. "Now, Mr. Sharpe, use your wits! It's very naughty of you young men not to try to make the evening go! Think of a proverb at once, Mr. Sharpe!" with a poke of the fan, and a most engaging air—half-imperious, half-beseeching. Walter thrust his hands in his pockets, and looked somewhat impudently in her face as he answered:

"Yes, Miss Judd; I've thought of one I think you'll like. What do you say to 'Man proposes?'"

The proverbs fell through.

We had some music. George Prout and Miss Benbanks sang a duet. Miss Judd played a fantasia, with long runs, and uninteresting shakes, and the air with the left hand and fireworks with the right. Walter Sharpe rattled through a medley of street-tunes, skilfully strung together by himself. And then old Prout said we were to sing a Hymn. A good many of the people would rather have been excused, I know; however, we all stood up, and the key-note was given. Wilkinson, who looked dreamy and tired, started the hymn too soon, and Walter Sharpe laughed audibly—calling down a stern reproof from old Prout. We got through the hymn—each verse being read out before sung: and shortly after, the party separated—those who were only guests of the evening going home—these who were staying at the Court departing to their rooms.

We had a cosy family Christmas. A good deal of kissing under the mistletoe, at which Walter Sharpe (he was to stop for the wedding, it seemed) proved himself a great adept; and in which Miss Benbanks was in much request—more request than George liked, I fancied. She was certainly a very nice girl; and, if she had not been an heiress and engaged already, I might have been a little smitten myself.

She was going to remain at the Court until her marriage, for she had no other home. The day before the interesting event George was to go to a neighbouring friend, from whose home he would drive to the church. This was all the concession they were going to make to the demands of etiquette. Perhaps it was a queer way of managing, but the Prouts are not conventional.

A day or two after our arrival at Bilbury Court, Wilkinson began to shut himself in his room, and work as hard as ever at his writing. The rest of the household took this rather ill, and old Prout commenced to lead the poor fellow an awful life. Each meal-time was a season of verbal castigation from the father, met by high-flown perorations or dignified silence from the son.

One night at dinner, a servant entered and handed a number of post parcels to Wilkinson.

"That stupid woman in Keppel Street!" he muttered angrily. "What is she sending the things on for?" Poor Wilkinson! His face grew red, for he knew all eyes were on him, and that everyone was aware it was a number of his fatal rejected MSS., which our landlady had too conscientiously forwarded. He looked defiantly up at his father, whose wicked twinkling old eye was on him. "You needn't suppose I care!" he cried. "I'm not the first man of genius whom it has taken time to be appreciated!" And he left the room.

Wilkinson appeared no more that night. In the drawing-room I heard Miss Benbanks and her lover talking about him. "I am so sorry he is shutting himself up like this," George said. "It must seem so odd to you, darling; and I fear too, he is having an unhappy visit. I wish you would try to persuade him to spend at least his evenings in the drawing-room."

"I will try if you wish it, George. But you must not imagine that because my persuasions might have weight with—you—that they would influence others."

"I am sure you could do a great deal with Wilkinson—poor fellow; he is very queer. If you could persuade him to come amongst us every evening, that would be *something*. Will you try, dearest, for my sake? Will you do all you can with him?"

"I will, George. I will certainly try."

Accordingly, next morning, after breakfast, when Wilkinson had gone out to take his usual solitary morning stroll among the leafless trees, I saw the pretty, well-furred figure of the heiress encounter him as if accidentally. They spoke for some minutes and then continued their walk together. I fancied, though, that she was having a heavy job to make him talk, and that he would have preferred his solitary musings. George Prout watched them complacently from the window of the breakfast-room, and said half-aloud: "I believe she'll be able to make another man of him!"

She seemed pretty successful in her coaxings and persuasions. He spent that evening in the drawing-room. And, though he crouched about on sofas, thinking till his forehead was quite like maccaroni, yet it was an improvement, no doubt. He continued to spend his evenings downstairs after this.

I could but think, as the time went on, that Miss Benbanks had shown great address in weaning Wilkinson from his hermit-like seclusion. As the wedding-day approached he threw off his usual melancholy manner, and at times was quite gay and excited.

"Take my word for it, father," said George Prout, in exultation, "Deborilla will make another man of him. After she's his sister she'll have a right to reason with him on his folly, and laugh him out of it even more than she can now; and I haven't the least doubt she'll reform him so that we shall have him back in Mincing Lane soon."

"I don't know how to thank you, dearest," he said, another time, to his fiancée, "for your kindness in taking poor Wilkinson in hand. He is certainly coming back into his old self. Only I do hope, love, that in carrying out my wish to try and reform him, you are not tiring out your patience. I'm afraid he bores you terribly of an evening, with those endless conversations he inflicts on you, and those extracts from his works."

"Oh, I'm not easily bored, George," returned Deborilla. "And did I not promise to do all I could with him, for your sake?"

It was a merry time, the few days preceding the wedding. Presents came pouring in. The neighbourhood quite approved of the affair. An heiress with five thousand a year is certain to be overloaded with marriage-gifts, while her poorer sisters, who really need such proofs of kindness, have to be satisfied with a smaller and less costly array of presents. Each of the three bridesmaids had come provided with an appropriate offering. Old Prout gave a splendid silver tea and coffee service, with the monogram G. D. P. on every article. He also gave Deborilla an exquisite boudoir piano: a perfect little gem, all ebony and gilt. Mrs. Prout's presents were a set of pearls for the bride, and a very handsome study clock for her son.

If I enumerated all the offerings, or anything *like* all, I should trespass unwarrantably on the space allowed me, and weary you sadly, to boot, so I will content myself with saying that they made gorgeous array, set out in the small drawing-room—George's gift, a full suite of diamonds, flashing in its case from the place of honour. Miss Judd sent a white and gold drawing-room book. There was a bookmark in it, worked by herself with the words, "We shall meet in Heaven." Walter Sharpe, who had not been prepossessed in the lady's favour, said he wasn't at all so sure about that, at which the three bridesmaids fell into paroxysms of laughter. The bridesmaids had been just a week at the Court. Walter had made an impression on all three, I thought, and rather envied him his triple conquest. I felt just a little cut out, and considered that he might have left at least *one* for somebody else. I was not very much astonished, therefore, one dusk afternoon on my return from a walk, three days before the eventful Thursday, to hear in the shrubbery path, which ran parallel with that I was pursuing, and was separated from it by a high bank of evergreens, the report of a tender salute, followed by a remonstrance in a female voice.

George Prout was out, I knew; besides, he and his betrothed would have no need to sneak out into the garden on a January evening to exchange the kiss of peace. It was Walter Sharpe, I said to myself, up to his usual tricks. I hastened on, having no wish to play the spy; but before I was quite out of ear-shot, a few hurried, impassioned words were spoken by a man's voice, and the girl said: "It frightens me to think of it! It is so sudden! Oh, what will they say of me?"

"Well," I mused, as I entered the house, "Walter's carrying his flirtations into real earnest at last! Which of them has he proposed to, I wonder?" For his attentions had seemed pretty impartially divided among the three fair bridesmaids. I watched him that evening, to see which it was, and was fairly puzzled. He turned over the leaves of Blanche Perry's song, and looked languishingly in her face the while. "Oh! *She's* the one!" I thought. Lo! Five minutes afterwards he was sitting at a table, looking over a book of prints with Annie Stone, and I saw a small struggle beneath the rosewood, in which Miss Annie, crimson in the face, was too evidently endeavouring to free her own hand from a stronger one. "Of course, then, *she's* the one!" I said. "That settles it!" But at eleven o'clock, when the ladies were retiring, I distinctly heard him say, as he wished Bertha Crawford good-night: "Why have you been so cold to me all the evening? Have I offended you, Bertha?" "Well, hang it!" thought I; "I give up trying to find out which it is! He must be going over to Salt Lake City!"

The night before the wedding. A gay party in the drawing-room. The bridesmaids have "tried on" their dresses and come down to be inspected. Very pretty they looked in them—dark crimson velvets with great tippets and small caps made of snow-white ostrich feathers. "A most piquant and stylish get-up for a winter wedding!" was the verdict of the lady judges. Walter Sharpe went into ecstasies over them.

Miss Benbanks seemed to take very little interest in the display. She was, not unnaturally on such a night, somewhat distraught and ill at ease. George hung over her assiduously. Old Prout plunged his hands in his pockets, and said he wanted a little more drilling in his part of giving the bride away. Wilkinson leaned on the mantelshelf and gazed into the fire. He was rather flushed with poetic fancies; I thought some new idea must have occurred to him—a thrilling scene, perhaps, in the political novel he was writing.

We separated early: it being supposed that all our powers would be taxed to the utmost on the morrow.

The household at Bilbury Court was astir betimes in the morning. I was down at a little past eight; but found the breakfast-room as yet an unexplored region. The usual morning repast lay on the table, but no one was there to partake of it; so I made a hearty meal alone. Trays were being taken up to the rooms, in order that usually late risers might be able to get under weigh at once, and proceed with their toilettes as they breakfasted.

There was much to be done. The bridesmaids had to make their extensive toilettes, and then dress the bride. And the sacred edifice, at which Deborilla and George were to be made one, was a good half-hour's drive away.

I had nearly finished my solitary repast, when a considerable amount of feminine talking upstairs attracted my attention. I

listened for some time, and, at last my curiosity being roused, went to the open door of the breakfast-room to hear further.

Across the hall, the dining-room door stood wide, showing the glittering splendour of the wedding breakfast—a vast expanse of snowy damask and dazzling crystal and silver, varied by banks of exotic blooms whose fragrance came to me where I stood: and, rising from the centre, the gorgeous bride-cake. My attention was drawn from this attractive sight, however, by the voices above.

"You must be dreaming, Watkins; you went into one of the spare rooms by mistake."

"Indeed, miss, I did nothing of the kind! I suppose I know my mistress's room by this time! I carried up her tray and I knocked and knocked till I was tired; and then, thinking she must be still asleep, though it isn't often ladies oversleep on their wedding-day, I should say, I made bold to go in. And the room's empty! Go and see for yourself, Miss Perry, if you doubt my word."

"She must have gone for an early walk!" said the voice of Miss Blanche Perry.

"It must have been a very early one, then, miss, for the bed hasn't been slept in!"

At this point I made bold to ascend the stairs and inquire: "Is anything wrong, Miss Perry?" "Oh!" cried the young lady, "Watkins tells a queer story of Deborilla's room being empty. And it's almost time to begin dressing her; what are we to do?"

I really could suggest nothing on the spur of the moment. If I had been Walter Sharpe I might perhaps have known what to do or say: but I was always slow. And Walter had gone away with George in the quality of best man (Wilkinson having from the first declined that office), so we should not see him again till we got to church.

At this moment a servant with a breakfast-tray came in sight at the end of the gallery. His face looked scared. "What's the matter, John?" I called out.

"Oh! sir," he said, "I took Mr. Wilkinson up his breakfast, and I knocked and he didn't answer, and I went in—and his room's empty, and the bed's not been slept in!"

For a moment we did not put the statements made by the two servants together. Then, Miss Perry gave a loud scream and came and clung to my arm.

In half a second the corridor seemed to be full of people. The two other bridesmaids, in different stages of their respective toilettes: old Prout in his shirt-sleeves; Mrs. Prout without her front; and several fogies who had arrived the day before for the wedding: all talking and scolding, and shouting, and finally setting off in a body for the bride's room, followed by a crowd of open-eyed servants.

It was a large, handsome apartment close at hand. We flocked round the door and looked in, as old Prout and Mrs. Prout and the three bridesmaids made an incursion. All still and quiet and orderly.

The blinds down before the three great windows. Long mirrors on every side reflecting the scared, wondering faces passing before them. On a couch at the side of the room the pearly satin robe, all clouded over with costly lace and garnished with orange-blossoms, which the bride should have been donning at that moment.

"Here's something!" cried the shrill voice of Miss Perry from the toilette-table: and she held up a note that she had unpinned from the cushion. "Directed to 'George Prout, Esquire.'"

"Give it me!" shouted old Prout. Then, turning to his wife: "Good heavens, Priscilla! She's jilted him!"

"Oh! if you please, sir," said John, edging his way into the room, "here's a note as I've found on Mr. Wilkinson's dressing-table. It's for Mr. George."

"Send for Mr. George at once," roared the old gentleman, as he took possession of both missives in his trembling hand. "Here! get out of the way all of you! Clear out! Get some water or something; here's my wife fainting!"

In a very few minutes a messenger had gone on the wings of the wind over to Heathcote, where George and his groomsman had spent the night; and in a very few more the sound of a dog-cart driving up at full speed was heard, and George Prout in his bridegroom's attire and ashy pale, came tearing up the stairs, followed by Walter Sharpe, very smart and very round-eyed and wondering.

"George, my dear boy," said the father, who seemed really upset, as he gave the son the two notes, "I'm afraid you've lost her!"

George tore open the letters; read a few lines, then dashed them to the ground—danced on them for a short time—and, with a cry of "I'll catch them yet!" rushed down the house, out at the front door, mounted the dog-cart, and drove off, as if for life.

Of course we picked up the letters and read them. We should hardly have been human else. Miss Benbanks' ran as follows:—

"My dear George,—I know I am doing what will earn me much blame and reproach. I know it is a great deal too bad to leave you in the lurch like this: altogether inexcusable. But Wilkinson and I suddenly discovered, two days since, that we were all in all to each other; and there was nothing for it but the course we have taken. No doubt you will be mad against me at first; but I shall hope for your forgiveness in time: even though I tell you that I have had lately a lingering suspicion that my fortune was my chief attraction in your eyes; whereas Wilkinson loves me truly for myself.

"When you are inclined to blame me most fiercely, pray remember that, after all, I am but carrying out to the utmost your own wishes. You have said, so often, 'For my sake do all you can with the poor fellow!' I found I could do even more with him as his wife than I could as his sister; and so—I hope you will in time forgive

"Deborilla Benbanks."

Wilkinson's epistle consisted of a verse of which the first two lines are all I can recollect just now. They were:

> "I have stolen thy bride! My brother, forgive!
> We found that, if parted, we never could live!"

It was certainly a galling thing for George to read that verse; and I sympathised heartily with him for about the first time in my life. To say that we were amazed at the trick Miss Benbanks and the poet had played us is to convey but a very faint and inadequate idea of our feelings. We were positively thunderstruck! The couple had, in the language of the stage, so completely "kept back their business," that the elopement came upon us like a cannon-ball.

The morning of that strange day was spent by the pseudo wedding guests in moving blankly about the house and wondering if they ought to go or stay.

Mrs. Prout shut herself into her room. People who had meant to see the wedding and found there wasn't one, passed in little groups looking up at the windows: they couldn't get very near, luckily, for the grounds were pretty large. Miss Judd, in a very short dress, stood looking in through the railings of the garden for about half an hour; and then made inquiries at the kitchen-entrance: and hearing there was to be no wedding as the bride had run off, asked for her present back again.

Old Prout, I could not help seeing, even at that early period, was more inclined to admire than upbraid Wilkinson. Much as the father felt for his elder son; yet I was certain that in the paternal estimation, the "fool of his family" had risen many steps by his last freak—a whole flight at least. I suppose the old gentleman did not so much care who secured the heiress's fortune so long as it was kept in the family.

The fugitives were found to have escaped through the French window of the library, which opened on the garden. One of the servants came forward and spoke to having found the shutters open and the window unlatched, when she entered the room that morning.

George Prout returned late in the day fagged out, and so savage that the proverbial bear, whose head is in such an uncomfortable state, wasn't in it with him. Of course he had found no clue to the runaway couple.

I hastened to mentally absolve Walter Sharpe from the charge of carrying his flirtations to such serious lengths as I had believed him guilty of three days before. It was clear enough *now* who were the agitated pair in the shrubbery path that evening!

That is some months ago now. Mr. and Mrs. Wilkinson Prout occupy a charmingly romantic retreat on the banks of the Thames—up Richmond way.

The old Prouts have forgiven them (if they had anything to forgive, which remains a question) and visit The Laburnums pretty often.

It is a lovely place in summer weather, and I am thinking of accepting Wilkinson's pressing invitation to spend part of my holidays there next August.

Whether George Prout will ever be reconciled to his brother and his sister-in-law is a matter of uncertainty. He shows no signs of such a condition yet.

Not long since, in a first-rate publisher's list of "Works in Preparation," I lighted on "Poems: by Wilkinson Prout." He can bring his works before the public now that he is a man of means. Whether that vague and imposing Unknown Quantity will ever read them is its own look-out.

Last week I received a copy. It contained several things I had heard already, and some new matter—so much better than the old that I supposed his wife had been helping him. Turning over the pages I saw a good deal of "To my Mother," "To my Father," "To D——" "To the Same," "To the Same," "To a Friend," "Lines Written on Hearing my Uncle had Fallen Downstairs," and, to crown all, "To my Brother G——"

I should like to see George's face if he ever comes across that last poem!

A BIRTHDAY GREETING.

WHAT shall I wish thee for the coming year?
Twelve months of dreamlike ease? no care? no pain?
Bright spring—calm summer—autumn without rain
Of bitter tears? Would'st have it thus, my friend?
What lesson, then, were learnt at the year's end?

What shall I wish thee, then? God knoweth well
If I could have my way no shade of woe
Should ever dim thy sunshine—but I know
Strong courage is not learnt in happy sleep,
Nor patience sweet by eyes that never weep.

Ah, would my wishes were of more avail
To keep from thee the many jars of life!
Still let me wish thee courage for the strife—
The happiness that comes of work well done—
And afterwards the peace of victory won!

M. E. F.

A LUCKY MISTAKE.

"TOM," said my father to me, one cold November afternoon, as we stood in the flag-paved hall of our old-fashioned farm-house, "you'd better put the little bay mare in the dog-cart and go into Worthington for that saddle. I clean forgot to call for it yesterday, and if you want to go out with the hounds on Saturday, you won't have another chance of getting it."

Thus my stalwart, weather-reddened, grey-haired old sire, as he put on his rough hat and took his thick walking-stick from the stand, preparatory to going about the farm. It was about three o'clock, and dinner was just over: for the time of which I speak was twenty years ago, and the farmer had not then learnt to live according to the laws of a fashion unsuited to his income and his occupation, or to ape the style and expenditure of his landlord. My father was an old-fashioned yeoman, who tilled the land which his great-grandfather had tilled before him; and even had he lived in these days, when men of his type are rare, he would have kept to the old-fashioned ways.

I was nothing loth to act upon the parental suggestion, although it meant a long drive in the biting cold, and although the return journey would have to be done in the dark, or with very indifferent moonlight. We were utterly isolated at the Mistletoe Farm; for we were seven miles from Worthington, our nearest town, and ten miles, in the opposite direction, from the nearest railway station. My father farmed nearly five hundred acres, some of the land—especially that lying towards Worthington—being very poor stuff and only fit for sheep. There was not even a village near; the labourers lived in cottages scattered over the estate; and in the depth of winter, when there was snow, or when the floods were out, we were often a week at a time and never saw a soul besides ourselves and our employés.

But we always had a good bit of horse-flesh in the stable: as, indeed, was absolutely necessary, when our only means of communication with the outer world was by road, and when the distances were so great and the roads so bad. The little bay mare that I was going to drive—Fly-by-night was the name we afterwards gave her—was a young one of our own breeding, clever as a cat and docile as a dog. From her infancy she was my playfellow; would come to me when I whistled to her, eat out of my hand and my pocket; and when the time came for backing her and breaking her, there was nothing to be done. She had perfect confidence and trust in us all, and especially in me; the cat by the fireside could not be more gentle or more easy

to control. If only people would learn that a horse can, by kind treatment and constant association, be made as tame and affectionate as a household pet, there would be fewer broken bones from back jumpers and runaways.

She was a world too good for harness, I thought to myself, as I led her out of the stable and proceeded to put her to the old-fashioned, square dog-cart, which turned up behind, and looked like a mail cart—barring the colour, which was a dingy grey. The little mare was my hunter when the hounds were within reach and my father would let me go: and she carried me as gamely, even after twenty miles of harness the day before, as if she were one of the Squire's cracks and went out only once a week.

As we trotted quietly down the drive, my father put his head over the hedge and called to me.

"Maybe the saddle won't be finished," he said, his red face glowing with the cold, his eyes glancing critically at the mare. "If so, you can put up at the Angel and have your tea; but don't be later than you can help. Have you got your watch on you?"

"Yes," I said, wondering at the question.

"You'd better give it to me," said my father, stretching his arm over the hedge. "I heard yesterday, at the ordinary, there was a gentleman stopped last Monday night on the road. You haven't got too much money on you, I suppose?"

"No danger," said I, with a laugh, as I put my watch and chain into my father's big, brown hand. "They won't get much out of me if they try it on."

And off we went, turned into the high road and sped at a quick trot through the gathering twilight in the direction of Worthington.

It was dark when we reached the outskirts of the little town, and the lights, not very brilliant if tried by modern standards, sparkled cheerfully enough in the windows. Past the blacksmith's forge, with the great bellows roaring and the sparks flying from the glowing cinders; past the butcher's, with a goodly display of some of our best beef; past the grocer's, where the half-dozen children who were flattening their noses against the panes turned to look at us; and so, clattering over the uneven cobbles of the pavement, to the saddler's shop. The proprietor himself, a staid and portly person, conscious of the importance which attaches to his position in a country town, came out and nodded a greeting.

"A cold night, Mr. Tom," says he, with a shiver, as the wind took his apron. "I'm not quite ready for you. Your father didn't come in yesterday, so I thought you wouldn't want the saddle till next week."

"I want it for Saturday," said I, leaning sideways out of the trap. "The hounds are at the coppice, and the little mare and I are going. Can you do it for me if I put up?"

The saddler thought a moment.

"Ay, I can do that," he said at length. "Will you call in between eight and nine and it shall be ready for you."

I agreed, shook up the mare, and, a few yards further down, turned in through the narrow gateway of the Angel into the dim, deserted inn-yard. From a single half open doorway came a stream of light. A figure issued forth in answer to my summons.

"Good evening, Mr. Tom," said this person, approaching and patting the mare's neck.

"Hallo, Jack! is that you?" said I, as I drew the reins through my fingers and alighted, recognising, as I did so, Mr. Jack Plover, to whom was entrusted the important duty of conveying the Queen's mail-bags from Worthington to the railway town. "You'll have to wrap up warm to-night."

"Ay! bitter cold, that it is," answered Jack, undoing the traces. "But law bless me! I'm used to it. If only I'd got as good a thing between my shafts as you have here, I'd think nothing of a seventeen-mile drive, I do assure you, sir."

"Your old pony isn't to be despised, either," said I, holding up the shaft while Jack drew the mare out. "A new pair of forelegs and sound bellows would improve him, but except for that ——"

"Well, he isn't quite Newmarket or Doncaster, I do confess," said Jack, leading the mare in through the open doorway and putting her in a vacant stall. "But he's good enough for his work. I start early and we take it easy. You won't have the collar off, sir?"

"No," I said. "I am off again in an hour or so. Will you have a drink, Jack?"

We crossed the yard, passed through a swing door and found ourselves in the warm, cheerful bar, where the bright light made us wink after the darkness outside, and the huge fire sent a leaping, ruddy glare on the red curtains, and a reflection that danced merrily on the trim rows of bottles and glasses. The barmaid, buxom and fresh-coloured, smiled a welcome, and rewarded my compliments on her pink ribbons, and the roses in her cheeks by a "Go along with you," and a couple of glasses of steaming whiskey-and-water.

There was only one other occupant of the bar, a stranger to me. He was a man apparently verging on forty, buttoned up in a shabby great coat, and with his hat so slouched over his eyes that his features were hard to be discerned. To the salutation which I gave him on entering, he made no reply, but with arms folded, gazed fixedly on the floor.

"My service, sir," says Jack, raising the tumbler to his lips, and taking off the contents at a draught. "That's the stuff to keep the cold out. Although this is a bit too early. I ought to have waited until eight o'clock, just before I started."

"You can have another then, if you like," said I, with a laugh.

"Nay, sir," remonstrated Jack. "I didn't mean that. Is the clock right, miss?" he inquired of the barmaid. "Then I must be

going about my work," he added, receiving an answer in the affirmative. "Good-night, sir, and thank you kindly."

And Jack Plover, who was a sporting-looking figure with his Queen's livery and clean-shaven face, touched his hat politely and passed through the swing door.

The man with the slouched hat looked up as he left, and, addressing nobody in particular, inquired in a harsh, rough voice, with a queer burr in it:

"What time does the post go out here?"

"At eight o'clock," replied the barmaid, looking at her interrogator with no particular favour. "That is the driver of the mail-cart who has just left."

"So I judged," replied the man, rising, and putting some money on the table. "Is that right? Good-night to you."

And with a heavy, slouching gait, he strode to the door, and was gone.

After tea in the half-lit coffee-room, and a pipe in the bar, with the barmaid to tell me the gossip, I started at about half-past eight, called at the saddler's, put my saddle under the seat, and set out for home. As we passed the blacksmith's forge at the end of the street, there was a pony being shod, and Mr. Jack Plover, in a big great coat, was looking on at the process.

"Cast a shoe, Mr. Tom, and had to turn back," he called out as I passed by.

Out into the country, looking doubly black and dismal by contrast with the cheerful light and warmth that we were leaving behind; with the slanting rain driving full in one's face, so that it dazzled the sight; with grey piles of cloud hurrying overhead; with a veil of mist and darkness blending hurdle and hedge-row, field and tree into a vague, indistinct, grey mass. The road is muddy, and, albeit the high road, in bad condition; but the little mare has got her head homewards, and pulls her hardest towards warm stable and well-stocked rack and the society of heavy Dobbin and his brethren. Not that my little hunter is to be permitted to pull herself to pieces through ruts and over ill-laid stones, for there is Saturday in prospect, and, with the country in this state, we shall want the very last ounce. Now we are climbing a hill, and, anon, we are on the top, and the rain and the wind beat savagely upon us and the prospect on either hand is dreary enough. Now steadily down the shedding ground, with a tight rein and a careful look out for loose stones; for this is a deep descent, and one false step may take twenty pounds off the little mare's value. The banks are high, at all events, so there is some shelter, and down at the bottom there are trees on either hand.

It was pitch dark in this hollow, but I let the mare out at the bottom of the hill and gave her her head. Suddenly, with a loud snort, she swerved violently, ran the wheel of the trap on to a heap

of wayside stones, put there to mend the road; and in a second we were over.

I went out, of course, and the driving-box, the saddle, and a débris of miscellaneous articles after me. I landed partly on my shoulder, partly on my head, and was up again in a moment, although a bit dazed. The moment I gained my feet, I was seized by the collar, and a harsh voice exclaimed—not to me, but to someone else:

"Hold his head down—hold his head down!"

A dusky form sprang to the mare's head and kept her from attempting to rise. A third form knelt on the trap.

"By jove!" exclaimed this last fellow in an angry tone, "we've got the wrong man!"

"What?" said he who had hold of my collar. "Do you mean to say it isn't the ——?"

With a volley of oaths the other replied in the negative. The man who had hold of me released me and joined the other. They whispered together for a few seconds. Then the first one came back to me and said, with a fine pretence of indifference:

"Nasty accident, sir! But it might have been worse. It's lucky we were at hand to help you."

"I don't know about that," I replied, with no small acrimony, "for my horse shied at one of you. She never did it in her life before. You'll oblige me by helping to get her out."

In a twinkling we had the harness undone, and the mare, with a flounder and a stagger, was on her feet and shook herself in a disgusted fashion. The men said nothing, but obeyed my directions. Luckily, nothing was broken; the mare had rubbed a little hair off her, as well as I could tell, but her knees were all right. In seven or eight minutes from the time we went over, so quickly did it all happen, I was in my seat again, ready to start.

My assailants, or assistants, whichever they were, made no opposition, and seemed only anxious to get rid of me; they despatched me without a word, and I was a mile on my road before I fully realised what had happened. As is always the case in an accident, I could only recall what took place immediately before and immediately after, and for that very reason the words uttered by the men were more vividly impressed on my memory. What did they mean?

It flashed into my mind like a revelation. They had been misled by the shape of my trap; which, as I have said, was square behind, and looked like a mail-cart, while the darkness was too great in their place of ambuscade for them to see the colour. The time of my arrival was about that of the mail, had not Jack Plover been obliged to turn back; and the careful pace at which I had come down the hill accorded very well with the steady movements of Jack's nag.

And the voice? I had heard it somewhere lately—the man in the Angel bar, who asked, too, the time when the mail left. There was no doubt of the men's purpose.

How to prevent it? How to warn Jack in time? There was no road back but the one by which I had come, unless I made a detour of several miles. Neither was there a house near whence to get assistance. I pulled up and thought it out. A bruise on my right arm suggested something. I had fallen on my left side and this bruise was caused by the saddle tumbling after me. I made up my mind at once.

Turning in through the first gate I came to, I drove over the turf to a corner of the field where was a group of trees. Here I took the mare out; put the trap under the elms and turned the cushions; took off all the harness but the bridle, and saddled her. Luckily the bridle had no blinkers. I wound the long reigns round and round my arm, mounted, and thanking Providence for my knowledge of the country, rode at the nearest fence. There was a faint moonlight to help us, but it was terribly dark. My heart was in my mouth as we went at the fence, which was a big upstanding one, but I knew there was no ditch on the taking-off side, and I gave the little mare the word at the right moment. She jumped clean from under me and landed me on the crupper. I never shall forget that leap! If there had been anyone to see it I could have sold her almost for her weight in gold.

We were half way across the next field before I had regained my seat properly, and then the mad exhilaration of the thing took possession of both of us. There was a flight of hurdles next which we took in our stride. Then a bank and a close-cropped hedge that stood up, black as Erebus, against the grey of the night; which we jumped as though it were twice its height. Then a flock of frightened sheep went scurrying away into the darkness.

It was all turf, and, for the first time, I blessed the poverty of the land, that made it worthless to plough. A dozen fences negotiated in the same mad fashion brought us into a field that skirted the high road; and here we were pounded. There was a big bull-finch into the road, with a deep drop. To go on, parallel with the road, was impossible, for there was a made-up bank with a cropped hedge, full of stakes, and a deep drain, as I knew, ran on either side. I rode up and down by the bull-finch in despair. Was all my trouble to be in vain?

At last I made up my mind, and rode, not too fast, at the great, towering, straggling hedge. I put my arm across my face, shut my eyes, into it we went, and out of it, with a scramble and a flounder, we came—separately. The bull-finch brushed me nearly out of the saddle, and the mare and I dropped side by side into the road, but both of us on our legs. Before I had time to remount I heard the sound of approaching wheels, and a man whistling merrily.

"Pull up, Jack!" I called out.

Jack's whistle ceased, and a more astonished countenance I never beheld than the one which looked down from the mail cart.

"What the dickens ——?" he began.

Then I explained.

"Well," he said, at the end of it, without a word of commendation for me. "That *is* a good pony of yours. What shall we do?"

"I'll tell you," I said, for my blood was up with the excitement of the night. "Drive back to Worthington, get Rogers, the constable, and a pistol apiece, and let them try again."

"Done with you," said Jack, turning round. "You ride on ahead and find Rogers, and I'll wait for you by the old toll-bar."

In half an hour the constable and I were seated, very uncomfortably, on the back of the mail-cart and driving along as fast as Jack's pony could be induced to go. Our only fear was lest the fellows should have got tired of waiting, for it was quite an hour and a half later than the time when the mail should have passed them. Down the hill we went, our hearts thumping away with excitement, not to mention the difficulty of holding on, and Jack performing "My Pretty Jane" with exquisite variations.

Well, to cut my story short, we got one of them. The constable, in his eagerness, jumped down directly the first man had seized the horse's head, and the other two fellows made off. We got the right gentleman, though; the identical fellow who had been in the Angel bar and whose voice I had recognised. He was tried at the Assizes and, two other convictions being proved against him, was sentenced to seven years' penal servitude.

I went out with the hounds on Saturday, and my little mare was the heroine of the hour. The Squire himself came up to me, and after complimenting us both on our achievement, said:

"What do you call her?"

"Well, Squire," I replied, "we haven't given her a name yet."

"Call her Little Fly-by-night," said he.

And that's how she got her name.

THE CRUISE OF THE RESERVE SQUADRON.

By Charles W. Wood,
Author of "Through Holland," "In the Black Forest," etc.

IT chanced that the day after the Fleet reached Gibraltar was the anniversary of the Queen's Coronation. It was on that day we had mounted to the signal tower, and Broadley had come down dilapidated in mind and body. I had applied restoratives in the hotel, and seized upon a sedan chair that hadn't seen daylight for at least half a century, and we had made a triumphal progress through Waterport Street accompanied by a train of admirers some five miles long, more or less.

Before "doing" the galleries, and whilst we were yet strolling about the town, suddenly, as the clock struck twelve, the guns boomed forth from the seven vessels, and fired a salute. The ships, in honour of the day, had dressed at 8 a.m., rainbow fashion, just as they had dressed at Arosa Bay. The forts took up the tale. Everywhere guns seemed to be thundering forth their artillery, shaking the town to its centre, almost shaking the rock itself. The white smoke curled upwards in all directions. Every church in the town clashed forth its bells, mingling their sounds, not in a harmonious peal certainly, but in a right hearty one; as if they felt the occasion called for great rejoicing, commemorating the day when our beloved Queen Victoria publicly took upon herself the cares and responsibilities of a great nation and entered upon her long and prosperous reign.

The air seemed alive with sound; the town buzzed with excitement; the vessels of the Squadron looked gay and lively out upon the waters. It was a passing but brilliant effect, and when all was over, and the bells' last vibrations had died away, and the faintest vestige of smoke had dissolved and disappeared, the ensuing silence was almost startling. But it was a happy circumstance that thus recorded the presence of the Reserve Squadron at Gibraltar. The thunders of that salute of twenty-one guns innumerably multiplied, and the wild clashings of the bells, would long dwell in the memory of the people.

Journeying towards Gibraltar, some of us had now and then talked of the possibility of visiting Granada and the Alhambra. We were to be stationary nine days, and in that period much might be accomplished in the way of adventure and sightseeing. To reach the Alhambra in the short time at our command would no doubt be an undertaking, yet needing only courage and energy to make it possible. Again and again we returned to the subject, as a moth

hovers round a candle, painting the attractions of the Alhambra in all their gorgeous fascination, and firing our imaginations with tales and marvels that rivalled any of the Arabian Nights' entertainments. Captain and Mr Edward Jago were both anxious to make the excursion, if it could be done. That remained to be proved.

On reaching Gibraltar and making inquiries, it seemed that the idea must be given up. The steamer leaving for Malaga on Friday returned only on the following Thursday night. This would be running too great a risk, for the Fleet sailed again on the Friday morning. Any slight chance detaining the boat but a few hours (a by no means impossible occurrence) would throw everything out of gear. The *Defence* could not sail without her captain, and the much wished for excursion was reluctantly abandoned.

We who had wished to visit these halls, legends and traditions of the past were disappointed. Suddenly it began to be whispered that another boat, belonging to a French company, would leave Malaga on the Monday night and reach Gibraltar on the Tuesday morning. If this rumour proved correct, it would exactly meet our necessities.

"Away with you at once," said Broadley to me, on the Thursday morning, after breakfast. (He had begun to recover from the effects of yesterday's Jacob's Ladder.) "I can't land just now, but go you," he continued, in lordly and commanding tones; "learn all you can; and don't attempt to return on board until you are fully primed in your subject.—And good luck attend you!"

Away I went, under orders, determined to leave no stone unturned that would give our hopes and projects the ghost of a chance. The task was harder than I had bargained for. It was difficult to get at the right office and the right people, simply because the boat did not belong to Gibraltar, and merely called there in passing. I was referred from pillar to post, from Peter to Paul, in a way that would have worn out any ordinary amount of energy and patience. Some said there was a boat, some said there was not a boat. One affirmed that even if there were a boat, it would be impossible to visit the Alhambra in the given time; another declared that supposing it could be managed, we should all be dead with fatigue before we got back again. Perhaps it was well that statements were divided; had everyone kept to the same tale, discouragement would have been a very quick result.

Finally, after visiting a dozen offices and spending three hours in the task, it appeared beyond dispute that we could leave Gibraltar on the Friday morning at six; that a French steamer would call at Malaga on the Monday night and reach Gibraltar on the Tuesday morning.

Armed with this satisfactory information, I returned on board and changed the aspect of affairs. Captain Jago and his brother at once decided to make the attempt; Broadley and I followed so good a lead; and Captain Cator of the *Lord Warden* completed our party.

At five o'clock on Friday morning, the Captain's galley was manned and four of us put off for the little Spanish steamer bound for Malaga, and lying some way up the bay. Gibraltar, with its houses at the foot of the rock, and up the slopes, and overhanging the water, seemed yet in repose. The great rock rose, a ponderous mass, its outlines clear-cut against the flushed, early morning sky, and looking not unlike a lion couchant. We were in a southern

GIBRALTAR.

climate and need not dread the fickle changes of the north. Steady, cloudless blue skies, floods of sunshine by day, balmy, almost tropical nights—this would be our portion. Everything was in our favour. The very vapour that clung round the centre of the rock seemed slowly ascending and dispersing—a sure token of fair weather. It was an incense-breathing morn, to be enjoyed to the full. There was little shipping in the bay, and, turning the angle of the higher part of the rock, forming the lion's head, we spied our small craft getting up steam.

Soon we were in need of "incense" indeed, or something equally powerful and purifying. Are you acquainted, reader, with the odours of these little coasting Spanish boats? If not, 'twere idle to attempt to describe the indescribable. They are a concentration of all that is unpleasant, and we devoutly hoped the French steamer of Monday would prove an advance upon this. Yet might we have been worse off. The rest of the passengers—for the most part country people, almost peasants, travelling with baskets and bundles—allowed us quiet possession of the bridge, where we found ourselves unmolested, and as far removed as possible from a very complication of odours.

Captain Cator was seen approaching in his galley. Then followed two gentlemen from other vessels, who intended going on from the Alhambra to Seville, and rejoining the Squadron at Vigo. This brought up our number to the mystic seven. Just before starting, a courier came on board and offered his services, and we were glad to engage him. He proved an excellent guide: all trouble was taken off our hands, everything was well organised, and nothing in the end was left undone. Apart from the additional comfort to ourselves, the fact of having a courier so well up to his work, made, considering the limited amount of time at our command, every difference to our enjoyment and to what we were able to see in our travels.

Six o'clock, and away started the steamer, with its complement of passengers and smells. After our late quarters, we felt we had put to sea in a cockleshell that would scarcely have weathered a Mediterranean gale. But the waters were so calm, so blue, so placid, it was impossible to realise that they are ever disturbed by tempests. Surely they must for ever be thus mild and gentle, breaking upon their shores in quiet ripples that know little of ebb and flow.

We steamed down the whole length of the Rock, passing the Squadron. Perhaps we felt a slight inward glow and access of virtue as we reflected that out of that large company we only—a mere handful — had been found sufficiently enterprising to visit the Alhambra and thus make the most and the best of our spare time.

Rounding Europa Point, we came in front view of that mass of perpendicular rock, which looks appalling, and where the sailor boy had found his death. After this we got into the broad, blue waters of the Levant. The shores about here were low and flat, and not very interesting; nor did we steer very close to them. The sun steadily held on his course, the day grew hotter and more brilliant, the sea more liquid and sparkling. On the bridge, a space some eight feet square fitted up with benches, we were not so badly off, after all. It was clean, and, so far, a contrast to the deck of the little boat, which seemed to depend upon the clouds or a heavy sea for a wash down. Once in motion, too, the smells were less overpowering, the immediate region of the engine room less evident.

About ten o'clock we began to think that a second breakfast might reasonably follow the hasty and partial meal of 5 a.m., and Wiley,

our courier, went below to spy out the land and reconnoitre. Presently he returned to report progress. It was a good land, flowing with abundance; before eleven we should fare sumptuously. Oh, that delicious anticipation, the appetite every moment growing keener, to do justice to the savoury viands and baked meats! And oh, the reality, when, face to face with our hopes, they proved delusive as a château en Espagne. Not one of us, I am persuaded, has forgotten it to this day.

About eleven o'clock, seven hungry travellers might have been seen wending their contented way from the bridge to the little cabin in which the repast was spread: and before twelve seven hungry travellers might have been seen wending their slow and sad way back to the bridge, not more cheerful of countenance, in spite of all the *oil* that had passed before them.

We took our seats at the table, and certainly courses enough were supplied. We had to pass nearly all. Some were mysterious; messes undoubtedly; whether savoury, was less apparent. Others were dressed with oil that seemed to come straight from the engine-room, and the very odour was enough to last one for a week. One or two of us were glad to make out with bread and coffee, yet even the bread was sour and the coffee bitter: but they were free from oil, and that was saying a great deal. I think we were all glad to get back to the bridge and the pure air.

The coast was growing more interesting. Mountains rose in great piles, green and fertile, or barren and snow-tipped. Stretches of white coast were relieved by smiling valleys, and rugged passes; slopes on which we could discern orange groves, and olive yards; trace the long rows of sage-green trees whose fruit adds so much to the wealth and industry of Spain. Here and there a little ship-building gave life to the otherwise dead and deserted shores: small dockyards, so out of the world it was a wonder how they had come into existence. Factories we passed occasionally; tall chimneys that stood out in contrast with the valleys behind them. Villages, few and far between, nestled under the hills, dwelling in sight and sound of the eternal swish-swash of the waters.

Few stoppages hindered our progress: apparently, few stations or villages needed interchange with the outer world. We halted about one o'clock, at a small settlement given up to mining. Here landed a solitary passenger: a tall, fair, gentlemanly man, who looked more English than Spanish, with a weighty bag of money he had brought from Gibraltar. He guarded his treasure well, until it was safe in the hands of those who met him on the landing stage. It was destined to pay the men employed in the works, and once every week the journey to Gibraltar had to be undertaken for the supplies. Very bearable to-day; but in a rough sea, what an ordeal!

All down the coast, at intervals, we passed round towers, built, I believe, in ancient times by the Moors, for purposes of defence. So

the afternoon wore on until, towards five o'clock, a range of hills opened up in a grand amphitheatre, and Malaga, in a long line of houses, factories and settlements straggling far over the immense plain — the cathedral conspicuous in the centre of the town— announced the end of our present journey.

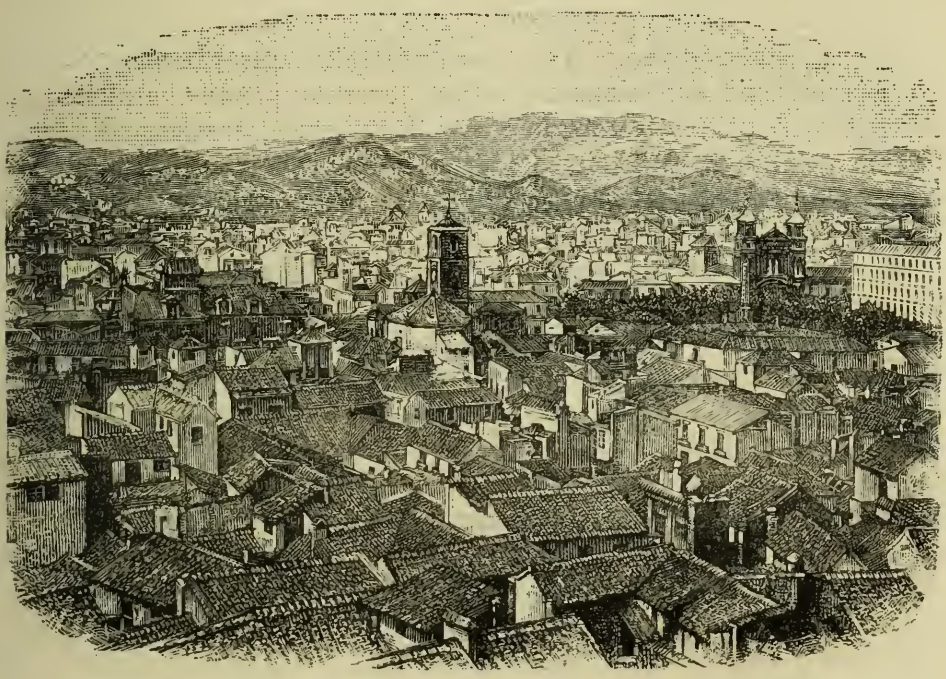
Malaga is favoured in many ways. Its plains are beautiful and fertile, abounding in plantations of the sugar-cane, which grows only in climates unknown to frost. Vineyards, olive yards, orangeries enrich the surrounding neighbourhood. The climate is unusually dry, and so far is better suited to some phases of consumption than Madeira, which is damp and relaxing. Rain falls, on an average,

THE SQUARE, GIBRALTAR.

about thirty-nine days in the year; and when it does fall, seldom lasts beyond a few hours. Clear skies day after day, and a constant flood of sunshine, are its chief features, and who could wish for anything beyond? Imagine this in England. What a paradise it would make of our little island, which, after all, contains beauties that touch the heart so closely, and perhaps, in their way, are unrivalled by the rest of this fair world.

Malaga sleeps in a warm plain, sheltered from the north and east by a grand chain of hills, that form so splendid a background to the town. One may follow the undulations in long-drawn lines, sloping downwards to the west until they are lost to sight. The hill behind the town and overlooking the sea, is a massive, fort-crowned rock, interspersed with patches of green and a few trees, that, to-day, had all turned to brown, were dried up and withered.

Not far from this hill, and opposite the custom-house, we came to an anchor. It would be necessary to land in small boats. No sooner at anchor than we were surrounded by a crowd of men, hustling, quarrelling, almost knocking each other down in their eagerness for employment. They swarmed on board until there was no longer standing room. The row and the smells were intolerable. If we all live to be a hundred, not one of us will forget that landing—our mauvais quart d'heure of the whole trip. It was half an hour before our traps could be got together, ourselves assembled, and the whole congregated in a boat for the shore. At the last moment, Captain Jago could not be discovered; but at length he was espied at the



BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF MALAGA.

further end of the vessel, standing upon a locker, keeping as far as possible out of the way of the smells and the boatmen; waiting in patience until we came to his rescue.

At last we moved off for the shore, full of thanksgiving at being free from the unwashed multitude. Would Malaga itself prove more acceptable?

We landed at the Custom House steps, gave up our keys to the courier, who, having nothing to declare, soon got through the form of visitation. Once free of the port, we found Malaga not only bearable but pleasant. The hotel was near at hand: a large building with a court, where people sat and drank Spanish wines and coffee, eat ices, read the newspapers, lounged and gossipped away the hours. A balcony looking into the court ran round each floor, up to the top of the house. Table d'hôte was at six o'clock, and we who had

fasted all day, felt that the good things of dinner could not come too soon. If we waited to dine in private until a later hour, we might fare worse.

On the way from Gibraltar we had decided that rather than stay the night in Malaga it would be better to charter a special train that evening on to Granada. We should thus save time, travel in the cool of the night instead of the heat of the day, and have an extra day at the Alhambra; the latter consideration most weighty of all. There was just time to make the inquiry before dinner; one of the hotel carriages was at the door, and two or three of us, piloted by the courier, started for the railway station. There we found that a special train was possible, but it would be neither fast nor satisfactory, on account of traffic in front that could not be shunted: and the charge would be £100. The sum, far beyond any reasonable anticipations, seemed extortionate; le jeu ne valait pas la chandelle; the officials were evidently not often asked for a special train, and seemed to throw as much cold water as possible upon the project: their very manner suggested that danger might lurk in any derangement of their ordinary routine: and we gave up the idea.

But there was consolation. We should dine in peace and see Malaga in the evening, rest quietly in our beds through the night, and start in the morning refreshed and invigorated, by the express (save the mark!) for Granada. So we returned, reported progress, and proceeded to make ourselves comfortable and contented. Our various quarters in the hotel were apportioned to us, but on demanding a bath for the morning, we created a sort of panic. It was quite ludicrous. The Spaniards evidently are not a "tubbing" race.

"You would never believe," said Wiley, our guide, courier, and general factotum, the next morning, "the trouble I had about those baths. I thought I should never get them at all. The hotel people had hardly ever heard such a request, and to provide them ran east and west through the town."

And, after all, they were forthcoming only in the shape of large, wooden, washerwomen's tubs; but they held water, and the supply was not limited, and, all things considered, we fared better than we had expected.

Our quarters were no sooner settled, than the bell rang for table d'hôte. Broadley and I, parched with heat and thirst, overcome with late odours, fainting for want of a decent meal within the last twenty-four hours, were seized with what the French would call *une envie* for *shandy-gaff*, overwhelming and not to be controlled. A voice within seemed to cry aloud that nothing but shandy-gaff would restore our equilibrium. The ordinary Spanish wines—such as are placed before the guests at tables d'hôte in Spain, and included in the charge for dinner—were utterly unable to meet our necessities. We turned from them as a capricious invalid turns from the dainties prepared to tempt him. The rest of our party went in for wines

refined and recherchés, scanning the list as connoisseurs, and weighing bouquet and strength versus climate and country. After murmuring such syllables as Dry Monopole, and Laffitte, they put down the list and turned upon us a supercilious gaze. We were mere Goths and Vandals, beyond the pale of refined humanity. Even Captain Jago, with all his kindliness and large heart, looked at us with a sort of Well-I-am-disappointed-in-you expression. An agonizing shudder went round at the bare mention of the word shandy-gaff. And it cannot be denied that there is something gross and plebeian, not to say rather low-lived, in the very sound. Nevertheless, how refreshing the beverage—on exceptional occasions.

We gave our description to the head waiter (he had never heard of the concoction : and what with that, and the order for cold baths in the morning, they began to suspect us of more than mere eccentricity) with a minuteness that proved our capacity for entering into details — a rare virtue—and waited for the result. Dinner commenced, and we cast impatient glances for our tankards. Captain Jago, who faced us—with a merry twinkle in his eye, that, indeed, was seldom absent from it—quaffed his light and sparkling wine to our health and reformation, and evidently felt that we had the worst of it. In a few minutes, before the soup had well-nigh gone round, the doors at the end of the room were thrown open, and the head waiter staggered in, bearing aloft a large tureen, full to the brim of what looked like eggs beaten up to a white froth. We consulted the menu —found fish was due—and this could not be fish. He came down the room with slow and stately step, and with as much ceremony as ever heralded the boar in ancient days, and to our intense surprise, triumphantly placed his burden between Broadley and me.

It was truly our shandy-gaff; four quarts thereof, at the smallest computation. We looked at each other, turned red, felt conscious and guilty, and very greedy; then joined in the laugh that went round. A large ladle had been provided by the thoughtful waiter—and the more we ladled, the more inexhaustible seemed the supply. Finally, it looked so sparkling and bright, so frothy and refreshing, that they who had gone in for wines of price and vintage almost began to feel as if we had turned the tables upon them. They were too proud to admit this, but they all looked it. Silence is golden, but does not always answer its purpose.

The dinner was a very fair one, and if a few mysterious looking dishes were discreetly passed, many remained in which lurked neither mystery nor any evil. The company at table, not very large or especially select, seemed composed of various nations, who "comported" themselves according to the manner of foreigners, and disposed of their food and their knives and forks in a way that Broadley and I thought far more agonising to refined nerves than our innocent shandy-gaff.

Dinner ended, we went out to reconnoitre, and turned into the

Alameda, a broad, handsome thoroughfare planted with trees, beneath which benches were placed at intervals. Here we sat for a time, contemplating human nature in its lighter aspect. The great heat of the day was past, but it was still warmer than was quite agreeable. The declining sun cast long shadows athwart the wide thoroughfare, crowded with Spaniards, men, women and children, enjoying what to them was the cool evening air. Nearly all the women carried fans, ladies and dependants alike. Thus it happens that fans are an institution in Spain; as much a necessity, an article of attire, as a gown or a handkerchief; and for this reason they form an important article of commerce.

The Alameda was not only alive with people, but the air buzzed

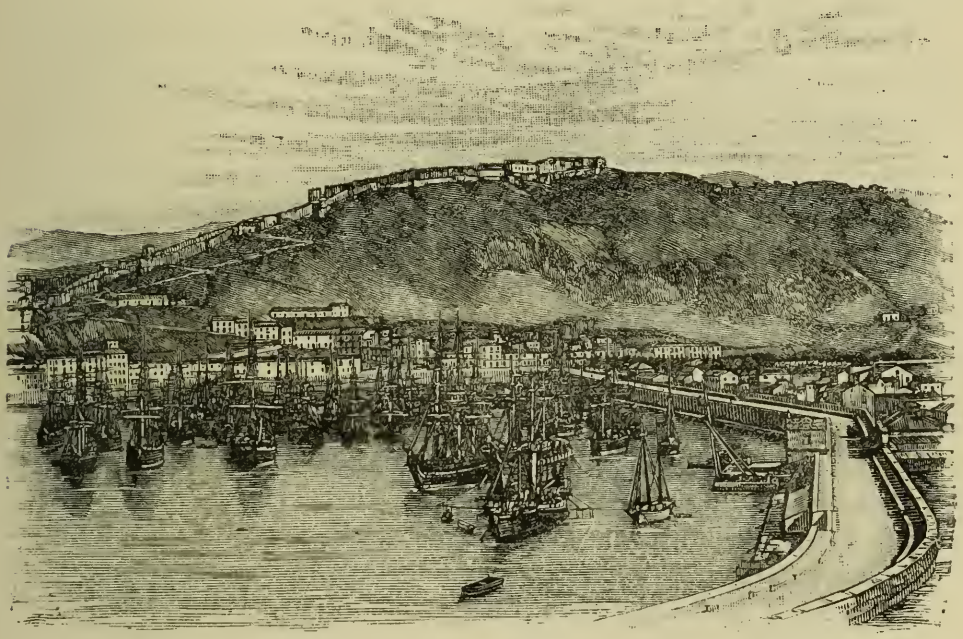
MALAGA.

with voices; women gossipping with each other, coquetting with the men—as only Spanish women know how to do; every now and then pausing to pick up or reprove a child—by far the least attractive element of the human race in Spain. Both men and women are singularly attractive; the women, graceful, languishing, captivating. With their dark, flashing eyes, and the contour of a lovely face delicately shaded and half concealed by the mantilla that only a Spanish woman knows how to wear, they are made twice beautiful.

It has been said that the Spanish women are formed for love; most certainly they are for admiration; and few, as certainly, come within the influence and intimacy of their daily life, the charm of their manner, the grace of their gestures, the unstudied voluptuousness of their attitudes, without paying the tribute at least of a wounded heart or a passing sigh. Spanish women, on their side, pay Englishmen the compliment of admiring them before all other races.

The Spanish men are many of them small; but so compact, so well proportioned and finely knit, so manly-looking in spite of their size, with their rich, warm colour, dark eyes and determined expression, that you forget all about their inches and find room only for praise. They have hands and feet anyone might envy, and on horseback look as if they had been born and bred in the saddle. Take them for all in all, the Spaniards, men and women, seem to me the handsomest race in the world.

Leaving the seniors of our party, who did not care for too much exercise after dinner, to this contemplation of human nature under the shade of the trees, Mr. Jago, Broadley and I, escorted by our invaluable guide, turned our steps and attention to the busy streets of



THE PORT, MALAGA.

the town. These were quite as crowded as the Alameda. Surely the whole population was abroad. The shops by this time were brilliantly lighted, darkness was falling rapidly—twilight lingers not here. The place might have been a small Paris, yet not so very small either. Jewellers displayed their flashing gems, haberdashers their glistening silks; perhaps the fan shops were not the least attractive. We entered one and watched two girls making a purchase. They were of the humbler class, yet they, too, displayed much of the abounding grace of their country. A small black shawl was thrown over their shoulders, with an air and a manner that in England is seen only in a gentlewoman. They were deliberate in their choice, and finally found a magnificent combination of gold and tinsel irresistible. These they appropriated, and proceeded to flirt open and use with a finished gesture that was quite startling.

Here we, also, made some purchases, but they had not the interest of our fans at Santiago : guiltless alike of the voluptuousness of Pyramid's and the refined and pastoral subjects that distinguished Oxford's and mine ; which had so raised, as the reader will remember, the admiration and approval of the ward-room. These from Malaga were mere groups of flowers, moonlight scenes and so forth ; pretty, but not startling ; and we bought them, I believe, more because they were so absurdly cheap than for any other special reason.

The streets were many of them narrow and straggling, the houses tall. After our late experiences of Carril and Gibraltar, Malaga looked large and imposing. In situation—bounded on the one side by that grand amphitheatre of hills, on the other by the blue waters of the Mediterranean, which flow up to its very doors—it is highly favoured.

Quitting the fan shop, we soon found ourselves on one of the principal squares. We had thought the streets crowded, but here we might have walked on the people's heads quite easily. It was simply thronged, and a gayer, more exciting scene could hardly be witnessed. The town might have been in revolt, a prey to flames, undergoing a siege —anything, in short, demanding strong measures and vast gatherings ; and yet they were simply enjoying themselves. That, and nothing more. All down the pavement, rows deep, men and women were seated at small tables, drinking, laughing, noisy, overflowing with fun and merriment. The hot night, and the clear, dark blue sky overhead, in which the stars flashed with southern lustre, allowed them to be bareheaded at will and lightly clad. The centre of the square as well as the sides, surged with the multitude, and many were idly lounging against the railings that enclosed a monument shaded by weeping willows. Lights flashed around in countless, dazzling profusion.

"Surely it is a gala night," said one of us, "and this a grand illumination ? "

"Not at all, sir," replied our guide. "It is an ordinary, every-day scene. If it were anything special, you would find a great deal more going on. The Spaniards are wonderful people for enjoying themselves."

This appeared evident. And it was easy to understand that a nation who put so much energy and fire into their simple recreations, would, when roused to riot and revolution, become almost insane and irresponsible for their actions.

One large house was resplendent with lights and gilding and the sounds of music. It was the chief café of Malaga, a gorgeous, imposing building ; and we entered. Delicious ices they gave us. They *have* delicious ices in Spain, and serve them in tumblers, not wine-glasses—and how grateful are they in that climate ! But what enchanted us most as we sat and looked and took it all in—the wonderful, moving crowd, the buzz of excitement, the energy of

young Spanish blood, the extraordinary feeling of life and health, youth and spirits, even in those no longer young—were the strains of music to which we listened.

Five musicians seated under the bend of the staircase were playing—four of them the guitar and one the harp—in a strangely-beautiful and telling manner. The effect they produced, the tones they drew out of the instruments, the exquisitely-marked time, filled us with amazement. We had never heard anything like it; I dare say we never shall again. At the Alhambra we listened to the king of the gipsies, who is also supposed to be a king amongst guitar players; we heard other famous players in Spain; but none that came up to this little group, sitting quietly apart in that Malaga café.

"Marvellous!" cried Broadley at last, who is not at all given to adjectives as a rule. "How on earth do they do it? Where does so much sound come from?"

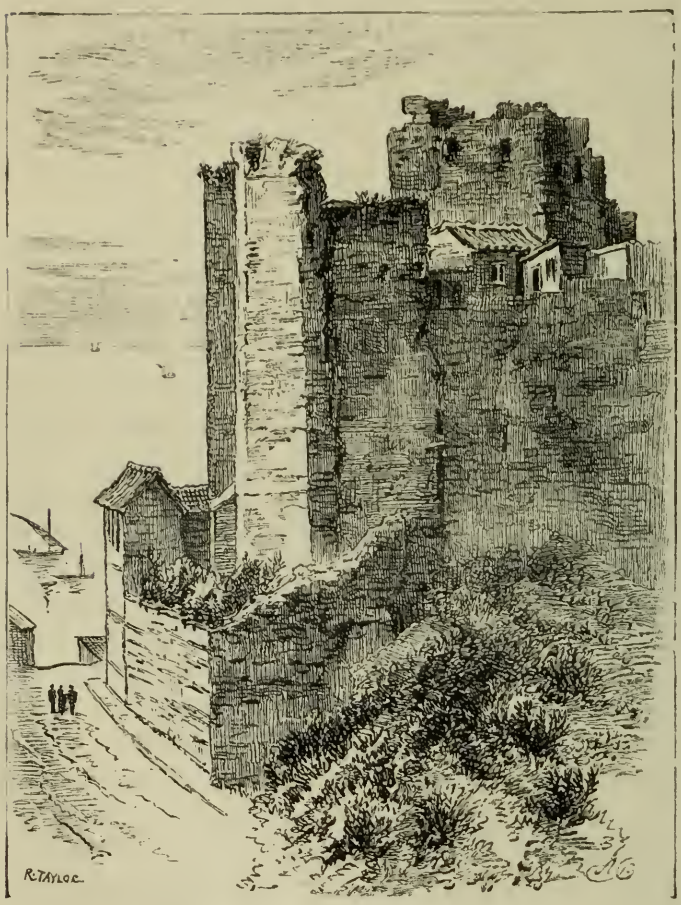
Presently we went up for a closer inspection, and, with dismay, found that they were blind. A sadder group, a more intent, pathetic expression than sat on the five faces, I never wish to see. Yet, no doubt, there was the secret of their success. Unable to take part in anything going on around, the attention undivided, the whole life devoted to the one object—they had concentrated all their powers upon music; and we had the result.

Yet it was almost too pitiful a sight, and we were glad to turn away, walk through the rooms above, and join the moving crowd. In one room gambling was in full form, and we watched the glances of those seated round the table, as pile after pile found its way to the croupier's heap: watched the expressive Spanish faces, the gleaming eyes, the fingers that clutched their winnings, the sighs, and sometimes the anger, with which one saw his silver or gold swept from him. We looked—and virtuously resisted the temptation. For is it not a temptation? The love of chance; the excitement of the mere game; the uncertainty attending it; the possibility of doubling and trebling the contents of your money-bag in so easy, so pleasant a manner. "There is a tide in the affairs of men—" and who has not said to himself: "Here, maybe, my tide has set in—I will risk my fate." And so risking, how few have not found that the tide was at the ebb instead of the flow, and has left them high and dry on the shores of repentance?

We neither played nor repented; but watched the tide awhile, gave a little more time and attention to the musicians, and went out again into the night.

Piloted by our courier, we visited one or two of the cafés chantants of Malaga, as they may be called by courtesy, for anything less like singing never was heard. We went out of curiosity, and were satisfied once and for ever with the pitiful sights and sounds. On a raised platform, six or eight women, coarse, bold and painted, sat in a semi-circle. A man in the centre extemporised, as they termed it,

surrounded by these satellites, whose part seemed to be to applaud him with stampings, castanets, and loud shoutings, whenever his inspiration failed him, brought him to a full stop, and caused a gap in the performance. The man's part was the worst of all. His face was impossibly disagreeable, hardly human. He sat and howled, dwelling upon one note until the veins swelled in his neck, and he grew almost black in the face, and his eyes started, and one wondered why he did not fall to the ground in a fit. Then he would utter a few unintelligible words, and howl again, sustaining the one note until it came out in waves of sound horribly painful to listen to. The place itself might have been the worst and most immoral in the world, but there was no outward token of it either in performers or audience; but the spectacle was so degrading that we were soon glad to escape into a purer atmosphere.



OLD MOORISH CASTLE, MALAGA.

These institutions seem peculiar to Spain. They possess neither music, wit, nor beauty. The cafés chantants of France and Germany may be bad enough, and are often coarse, voluptuous exhibitions in which ill-motives and low lives are only too conspicuous; but at least they possess some sense and music; are intelligible, if nothing else: perhaps only too much so. These popular performances in Spain are worthy only of idiots; and a greater idiot, to all appearance, than the hero of that night, never was seen.

We felt that gambling was better than this; those blind musicians were elevated into more than mortals by comparison; the town (now that the shops were closed, and the lights were out, and the crowds had dispersed and left the streets to the quiet of the night and the benediction of the stars) reflected the purity of the silent skies over-

head. Many of these streets were narrow, dark and tortuous; and now and then—an ordinary experience in Continental towns—we had to rush through with aromatic handkerchiefs held to our noses; but all this was bearable—almost agreeable, in comparison with the exhibitions which had lately done violence to our feelings.

We had a long day's work before us on the morrow, if not a hard one; it would probably be both; and we thought it would be wise to turn in before the small hours of the night had chimed. So we wended our way through the deserted streets to the hotel. There we found the rest of our party had sensibly retired; the house was in slumber steeped—or at least in peace. We too sought our dormitories; full of the morrow's anticipations, full of hope, energy and spirit at the thought of what lay before us in the next few days: the Plains of Granada, the majesty of the snow-capped Sierra Nevada; the glories of the world-famed, legendary halls of the Alhambra.

Before finally turning in, Broadley and I went out upon our balconies for a few moments' enjoyment of the night. The air was soft and languid; the stars in the dark sky were dazzling; the town was given over to silence and repose. Across the Alameda and beyond the opposite houses, the Mediterranean plashed lazily against the stone walls; we could hear the murmur, though we saw nothing of the water and the harbour shipping resting upon its bosom. The night seemed too fair to forsake, as, with a certain sacrifice to duty, we closed our shutters and sought oblivion—that blessed unconsciousness that for the time being ends all our joys and sorrows.

The next morning proved all that could be wished, including any amount of heat, and a flood of gilding, laughing sunshine. We were up betimes, ready to conquer the world. An early breakfast was despatched and the bill settled with the assistance of our admirable courier, though not without a laugh at its heading. Yesterday, on arriving, each, according to custom, had entered his name, designation, nationality, &c., in the book provided for that purpose by the exigencies of the law of the country. Captain Jago of the *Defence*, Captain Cator of the *Lord Warden*, and so on. This morning behold our party ennobled. The bill was thus headed: "My Lord Warden, Charles Wood, Esquire, and Party!" Why they should have pitched upon so retiring and humble-minded an individual for their second name, has remained a mystery to that individual to this day. With some fun and laughter, the bill was receipted, and I obtained possession of the document as a curiosity. We departed in the full flow of health and enjoyment (Mr. Edward Jago alone possessed the life and spirits of a hundred men, an inexhaustible amount of fun and humour) and were ready to appreciate to their very utmost all the beauties of nature and of art that might be before us.

MRS. CARR'S COMPANION.

CHAPTER IV.

WOMAN'S WORK.

LADY MARY EGERTON had asked Miss Keith to replace Miss Bythesea at her dinner-table, and, with feelings of misgiving, Viola complied with the request.

It was at this entertainment that she first made acquaintance with the Reverend Eustace Vaughan, a young curate, afterwards destined to play a not unimportant part in the history of her life at St. Brenda's.

He fell to her share at dinner, and rejoiced in his good luck in securing so particularly pleasant a companion, in place of the elderly widow to whom his fears had pointed. But presently, during the procession in parti-coloured splendour of the jellies and creams, his interesting neighbour's attention became suddenly distracted, the expression of her lovely features changed, and one of the very best stories of his collection, a relic of old college days, fell upon unheeding ears. She was listening to some talk that was passing at the other end of the table.

"Ah, yes!" someone was saying; "it might have gone hard with Romayne, if he had not cut the Gordian knot of his difficulties by taking himself out of the way of them."

"I don't know that," put in Colonel Kane, suddenly, picking up the thread of the conversation, and so making it general. "I have always understood that his greatest vice was weakness, and nothing worse. Whatever his faults may have been, he expiated them pretty dearly, poor fellow. 'De Mortuis,' you know!"

Glancing suddenly across the table at the end of his speech, he found his *vis-à-vis* Miss Keith's eyes fixed upon him with an indefinable expression of interest—nay, almost gratitude—which surprised him. But encountering his look of astonishment, she dropped them quickly, and took up her fork in some confusion, while he continued to address his nephew.

"By-the-bye, Wilfred, I think you once knew something of these Romaynes, did you not?"

"They were very kind to me when I was quartered near Fairhurst, their country place, two years ago," Captain Kane answered briefly.

"And Miss Romayne—you knew her, of course?—what is she like?" asked Olive.

"One of the most altogether charming and beautiful women I ever

met, present company only excepted," he replied, with a comprehensive bow to the ladies, at which Rose smiled, while Viola opposite blushed uncomfortably.

"Ah!" said Colonel Kane, "my friend Somerville spoke very highly of Miss Romayne. An only child, was she not? Her father, it appears, had taken good care of her, perhaps with a view to some such contingency; but when the crash came she insisted on giving up everything, even her beautiful jewels, and the personal belongings that were hers by right. The creditors would have made her an allowance, but, I hear, she would accept nothing."

"She is actually penniless, then!" said Lady Mary, touched, perhaps, by some shade of compunction.

"Except for her mother's little fortune; enough, she declared, to keep her from want. Somerville said she showed great sense and spirit, and deserved a better fate."

Olive was listening with eagerness, and would fain have heard further; but the conversation drifted away to topics of more general interest, and she learned no more of the girl who had once aspired to become her brother's wife.

Aggrieved by Viola's absent looks and tones, Mr. Vaughan made no further effort to progress in her good graces; and hoping, perhaps, to pique her by neglect, in the drawing-room turned his attentions where he knew they would be better received. Captain Kane dropped into a vacant place near Viola, and began talking low and earnestly. They were sitting in the recess of the window, half-hidden by the heavy velvet curtains. The easy confidence and familiarity of his manner distressed his companion; she withdrew a little farther away, and gave him chilling replies. He was quick to notice the change in her manner.

"What does this mean?" he began, half-angrily. "This is the first time we have met since yesterday, and am I to have nothing but cold looks after my compliance with your wishes?"

"You have my thanks," Viola answered, stiffly.

"I want some little reward as well. Come, we will make a compact. It shall be 'Miss Keith' in company, if it may be 'Viola' when we are alone. Circumstances have changed since we last met, and made the hopes I once indulged impossible; but ——"

Viola interrupted him haughtily. "Excuse me for reminding you, Captain Kane, that the unhappy circumstances you refer to had nothing to do with the frustration of your hopes. I believe it was long ago settled between us that they could never be realised. I must leave you now; Mrs. Carr will be expecting me."

Viola noticed the angry gleam in his eyes as he, too, rose and bowed in answer to her stately bend of the head.

"There! I have now provoked him to hate me!" she sighed to herself, as she walked away. "But what does it matter, after all? His hate is endurable, his love—is not!"

Viola was safely out of reach of experiencing the expression of either during the opening weeks of an unusually fine October.

Mrs. Carr caught a chill, which increased her usual ailments to such an extent that for a fortnight or more she was seriously ill, requiring constant and watchful nursing. For one of her temperament, she was a tolerably patient sufferer, and Viola, moved by sincere compassion, proved a most kind and trustworthy nurse. The invalid took a strange liking for the young girl, monopolising all her time and attention, and not enduring to lose sight of her even for an hour. But with the return of convalescence and the decline of physical pain came the re-appearance, in an aggravated form, of Mrs. Carr's former petulance and irritability. Viola had borne patiently the long and tedious confinement to close rooms, while the sun was shining, and birds were singing, and the reluctant swallows delaying their departure from a land where summer still lingered. But continued dropping will wear away a stone; and now that the stress was over her spirits began to droop, and her cheeks to pale, under the lesser trial of a worrying fault-finding that was almost incessant.

Now that her immediate anxiety was over, Lady Mary avoided the jarring atmosphere of the sick-room, where the most faithful service went unappreciated, and the most well-meaning attentions were ill-received. Walton, fretted by fruitless endeavours to please an unpleasable mistress, grumbled incessantly, and vented her ill-humour in impatience towards her fellow-victim, poor Viola, who was thus called upon to bear a double burden.

Even the usually unobservant Olive noticed her weary looks when she now and then encountered her aunt's companion in the corridor, which they both inhabited. These were their only meetings now, for during the last two or three weeks Viola had found it necessary to give up joining the family circle for the meals, which she now swallowed hastily in Mrs. Carr's ante-room.

Olive's own life at this time was a fully occupied and, consequently, pleasant one. Mr. Thorold, detained at St. Brenda's by his work for the Chapter, had undertaken to give her some hints in architectural drawing, a branch of art in which Olive was particularly interested. She was beginning a series of sketches in the Close, for the illustration of a work which her uncle intended to publish, and Mr. Thorold's lessons were, therefore, of infinite value. She would not allow to herself that there was also a pleasure in the renewal of their former habits of intimacy. The old childish days had passed away for ever, their respective positions had changed, and Thorold doubtless well understood that their present amicable league was a mere temporary business arrangement—an endeavour, on his part, to make some small return for her uncle's introductions and patronage.

Nevertheless, it was a fact that during his frequent visits to the Archdeacon, and the many hours that he and Olive passed together over their engrossing occupation, there had arisen a good understand-

ing and confidence between the two, which bordered strangely on their former friendship. Olive could talk to him as to no one else of aspirations, feelings, interests, lying far below the surface of her every-day life. She had unconsciously come to rely on his judgment, and to require his opinions to endorse her own. She scarcely knew how much in these long and confidential talks he was admitted once more into the inner sanctuary of her nature, and permitted to read its deeper secrets, hitherto guarded so jealously.

"I don't know when I have been so entirely happy!" she said to him, one day, as they were returning together from a seldom-visited nook in the Close, where Olive was sketching a ruined archway. "Perhaps it is because I am so busy and so much interested in my work."

"I have often thought that it is not the workers of the world who most deserve our pity," Thorold replied. "There is something wholesome and bracing about work, whatever its nature: we reap a benefit from fully occupied hours and diligently discharged duties, such as no mere pleasure-seeking existence can give. Work, like virtue, is its own reward; and whether the busy hand wields the spade or the darning-needle, the drones of the human hive may envy its owner."

"But, unfortunately, work is not always to be had for the asking, especially among my own sex. Indeed, how to enlarge the sphere of woman's work seems to me one of the great problems of the day. The time is past for their being, 'cabined, cribbed, confined,' Oriental fashion, and hampered at every step by the absurd conventionalities of society."

Thorold remained silent.

"You don't agree with me!" exclaimed Olive, a rare enthusiasm still lighting up her beautiful features.

"What does Lady Mary say?" he asked, replying to her question by another.

"Oh, mamma has no sympathy with the clamour for women's rights. She says, once descend into the arena of life, and we lose the 'crown of the causeway' and all our privileges for ever. But, then, mamma has always found plenty to do with her life."

"Exactly so. Women like Lady Mary are not likely to be at a loss. And, after all, it is by indirect influence that their work in the world is done. There is centrifugal as well as centripetal force. Work is generally given to those fitted and willing to undertake it; and it is those 'faithful over a few things' who are to be made 'rulers over many things,'" he finished, gravely. Then, seeing her bent head and thoughtful look, he added, smiling: "This sounds quite like a homily; but, indeed, I had no intention of preaching. Shall we go in?"

"Wait a moment." She was too much in earnest to notice his half

apology. "You say work comes to those willing to undertake it; but there is myself, for instance"—with the struggle which all reserved people feel in speaking of themselves—"except for my beloved drawing, just now, you cannot surely say that any work in particular is set before me?"

"There are many ways of helping our fellow-creatures, although the work may not be done with great noise and outcry. The little mouse was insignificant, you know, and went to work silently, yet in time it gnawed a lion free. In your case, I should say, rather——" he hesitated.

"What?" She waited imperiously for his answer.

"That, like many other people, you are apt to overlook the work near at hand in seeking for something grand and far off. Do you wish me to go on? There is your aunt, for instance. You were pitying Miss Keith, just now, for being kept in such close confinement all this fine weather. Could you not relieve guard now and then by taking her place?"

"You don't know my aunt. Her fidgety ways are intolerable."

"And poor Miss Keith has to put up with them day after day! Then it is pleasant work which women want—easy work; little to do, and plenty of credit to be gained by it. Anything but the work 'their hand findeth to do.' I see! Just as I thought!"

His harsh, almost scornful conclusion neutralised the effect of his words. Olive turned impatiently, and led the way to the house, towards which they walked in silence. It seemed as though she resented his plain speaking, though she herself had invited it.

Arrived at the threshold, Thorold gave up the impedimenta he had been carrying, and gravely went his way. It was almost like one of their childish quarrels long ago, which Olive used to take so much to heart. Thorold scarcely expected to find her in her usual corner of the Close that afternoon, yet was ruffled and annoyed, and thoroughly disappointed, as time wore on and still she did not come. He reviewed his words, and decided that she had cause for anger; but her indignation must have been great indeed to prevail over her eager wish to finish her sketch.

CHAPTER V.

SELF-SACRIFICE.

Olive, meantime, hastily despatched her luncheon, that she might return to complete her water-colour sketch of the old chapel before the sun left the ruins. As she was coming along the corridor from her room ready equipped with her sketching materials, she met Viola, taking her way, with weary step and pale face, back to Mrs. Carr's rooms, with a book which she had just been to select from the library.

Viola called up a faint smile and was about to pass by as usual; for

as she well knew, Olive's time was exactly meted out, and she could not brook delay in her movements. But, contrary to custom, Olive herself stopped, conscience-pricked by the white face and heavy eyes.

"I am afraid you miss your walks, Miss Keith; you are quite losing your colour."

"I have rather a headache this afternoon—nothing much; it may pass off presently."

"Not in Aunt Charlotte's warm rooms. Supposing," she went on, with the echoes of the morning's conversation sounding in her ears, "supposing you were to go out and get some air and sunshine this lovely afternoon, while I take care of Mrs. Carr for you."

Viola's face brightened at the unexpected proposal, and she looked up gratefully. But suddenly her eye fell upon the sketch-book which Olive was carrying, and she remembered the sacrifice which her acceptance of the offer would entail.

"But no; you want to finish your sketch. So fine as it is, too! No, I could not. But thank you all the same for thinking of me; it is very good of you. Mrs. Carr may, perhaps, be out soon: I shall do very well."

Her courageous struggle to hide her evident suffering, her wistful gratitude touched Olive. She put her hand on Viola's arm and detained her, as she was about to hurry away.

"My sketch can wait. Not a word more—I insist. Give me that book—put on your hat and go for a stroll, while it is bright and sunny." Olive's will when strongly exerted was as little to be resisted as her mother's.

"But Mrs. Carr!" hesitated Viola, half-yielding. "May I explain to her first?"

"Certainly not. Leave that to me, and go at once. I promise to remain with her till you come back, and to amuse her—if I can!" grimly. "Don't hurry home; I shall not expect you till tea-time; so take a holiday for once."

Olive retraced her steps to her own room, laid by her hat and unfinished sketch with a sigh, and was off to her self-imposed task. Viola, with a bounding heart and some misgivings, hastened out into the sunshine, which had surely never shone so brightly as on this glorious October afternoon. Walking briskly, with a new spring of life pulsing through her veins, she found her way to the nearest meadows; and there seating herself upon a rustic stile, overshadowed by a golden-brown beech-tree, feasted her eyes upon the long-desired sight of wild hedgerows, gay with a tangle of clematis and bryony, hips-and-haws; of changing trees, of open pastures, and filmy threads of gossamer, spreading like a fairy fabric at her feet.

How gratefully the rural sounds from distant farm-yards fell upon the ears accustomed only to Mrs. Carr's harsh complainings! How sweet came the piping of unseen birds from their shady coverts, and

the lowing of far-off cattle borne across the meadows! What a treat Olive's unexpected kindness had secured to her aunt's weary dependant!

Time flew fast in her rural solitude, but it was a refreshed and cheerful Viola who, an hour or two later, re-entered the Cathedral precincts, where the shadows were already growing long enough to bar out the sunshine. Under the great gateway she encountered Mr. Thorold, who looked up in surprise.

"Mrs. Carr is better, I see. Is she in the garden as usual?"

"No; she cannot leave the house yet."

"At all events, I am glad to see you out again. How did you persuade her to spare you?"

"It was Miss Egerton's doing. She made me take a holiday, and promised to fill my place meantime. I refused at first, for I knew how much she was interested in her sketching; but she would have her way, and here I am. Ah! if she only knew what a treat it has been! Only I have felt selfish in taking it."

"Not at all. I am sure Miss Egerton's pleasure this afternoon has equalled your own. I missed her from her usual place, but little guessed the reason of her non-appearance." And his expression grew so incomprehensibly bright and cheerful that Viola felt quite vexed with him. For she had been building up a little impossible romance of late to amuse her tedious hours.

Another acquaintance of the Egertons, who was becoming almost as frequent a visitor as Thorold himself, reached the Archdeacon's door just as Viola did; but, seeing her approach, turned to meet her. A vivid recollection of their former interview imparted an unconscious air of haughtiness to Viola's bearing, but Captain Kane's memory was apparently less good. He greeted her with an unembarrassed ease which relieved her at once, and nothing in his manner hinted that he bore her ill-will. Viola dared to relax into her usual self, and answered pleasantly enough his inquiries after Lady Mary and her daughters. Would he come in? Lady Mary was at home, and Miss Egerton. Her sister was spending the afternoon with a friend.

The slightest possible shadow seemed to flit across her companion's face.

No. He would come in some other day. His call was chiefly to inquire after—Mrs. Carr. Was she really convalescent?—And Miss Rose was out for the afternoon?

"Yes; she will only come back in time to dress for dinner."

"Ah! Perhaps when she returns you will be kind enough to give her this?" He produced a note from his pocket, which he handed to Viola, adding: "You will give it her yourself, will you not? I always mistrust servants' memories."

It was nearly tea-time when Viola entered Mrs. Carr's ante-room, with the old elastic tread that had been banished this week or more.

The familiar sound of the invalid's complaining tones penetrated even through the curtain, and she was not surprised to find Olive looking flushed and vexed.

"Oh, here you are at last!" was the invalid's greeting. "How long you have been, to be sure! Pray come and read to me. I am quite tired of the sound of Olive's voice. It is not nearly so pleasant as yours; and she will argue so over the book. She means well, I dare say, but it is tiresome of her. And the sun has been in my eyes all the afternoon. Olive could not get the blind right."

And so this was Olive's reward for the sacrifice of her afternoon! She jumped up and laid down the book, impatient to be gone while she could still restrain herself. Silently Viola followed her to the door and held back the curtain. Was she triumphing in praise won at her expense, Olive wondered, and stole a glance in passing.

But there was no triumph, only tears, shining in Viola's eyes, as, under cover of the curtain, she ventured to take Olive's hand with a grateful pressure between both her own, murmuring at the same time such a heartfelt "Thank you," that Olive's vexation all melted away in a keen sensation of pleasure. Perhaps, in atonement for her momentary suspicion, she yielded to a sudden impulse, and, bending down, kissed the gentle face upturned to hers.

On the whole, that was a happy afternoon for both the girls.

An hour later, Viola, going to her room at the summons of the dressing-bell, met Rose in the corridor, still in her walking-things, and seized the opportunity of discharging her commission.

"Here is a note which Captain Kane asked me to give you," she said, handing the letter, which was received with such a sudden blush that Viola thought it necessary to explain. "It is from *Captain* Kane, not his uncle."

"Yes; I understand."

At this moment, Olive appeared at the end of the passage, and in some confusion, Rose thrust the note into her pocket, and retreated to her own room.

Tête-à-tête with her mother, that evening, Olive could not help giving vent to some of her indignation against Mrs. Carr, for her want of consideration towards her companion. "To be sure," she owned frankly, at the end of her philippic, "Aunt Charlotte cannot help being ill!"

"But she can help being tyrannical," returned Lady Mary, with indignant emphasis. "What do you think happened last night? I was up later than usual, finishing some letters, so that it was long past midnight when I heard footsteps in the corridor, and that sort of stealthy movement which one notices in the general silence. I threw on a shawl, and hurried to your aunt's room, fearing that she was worse. There I found Miss Keith, in dressing-gown and slippers, pale as a ghost with the fright of her sudden arousal, actually book in hand, about to read Mrs. Carr to sleep! Her lovely chestnut hair

was all streaming over her shoulders, and certainly, as your aunt said, made a most becoming frame to a most beautiful picture; but I have no patience with her ridiculously inopportune personal remarks, which make poor Miss Keith most uncomfortable. I turned to Mrs. Carr for an explanation, for she was wide awake, and seemed much as usual. It appeared that she had sent her maid to summon Miss Keith, as neither of them could remember whether the mixture the doctor had ordered was to be taken every two, or every four hours! 'Is that all?' I cried indignantly. 'And pray what is Miss Keith doing with that book?' 'Well, Mary, I am very restless, and as she *is* here, I thought she might as well read me to sleep before she went,' your aunt answered, coolly. I lost all patience, and said, plainly, she should do nothing of the kind; and that if she required a companion by night as well as by day, we must take means to find her a second, for that the same person could not undertake everything. Then I saw Miss Keith back to her room, made some vicarious apologies for my sister-in-law, and absolved her in future from all unnecessary night-work."

"Poor thing!" cried Olive, with feeling. "No wonder she looks so pale and worn. She should not allow herself to be tyrannised over in such a fashion. I should not submit to such bullying."

"Nor does she always; for, gentle as she looks, that slight girl can pluck up a spirit sometimes. Walton told me a story about her the other evening. Mrs. Carr was in one of her fidgety moods, and had been most trying all day; impatient, worrying, and finding fault to such an extent that at last she actually succeeded in making the poor girl cry; no easy task, as Walton assures me, for as a rule she is a model of forbearance and self-control. Perhaps the sight of her tears made your aunt feel slightly ashamed of herself; for later on, when Miss Keith came in dressed for dinner to see if she wanted anything, Mrs. Carr made Walton bring her jewel-case, and, unlocking it, took out a handsome gold chain of Indian work, which she gave to Miss Keith, telling her to keep it as a token of her approval: 'for, on the whole,' she said, 'you please me very well.' Without a moment's hesitation, she gathered the gold links up in her hand ('Such a beautiful chain as it was, too, my lady,' said Walton), and handed it back to your aunt. 'No,' she said, firmly. 'If I have satisfied you, Mrs. Carr, show it by a little consideration. Have patience with me. Give me a kind word now and then. I don't want presents.' And, with a proud air of dignity, which seems to have impressed Walton immensely, she turned and swept out of the room."

"Well done, Miss Keith!" cried Olive, heartily. "I hope Aunt Charlotte felt really small, for once!"

"Miss Keith has both tact and strength of character. Certainly no one has ever managed your aunt so well before," owned her mother. "But her motive in clinging so persistently to so disagreeable a task remains a mystery to me."

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNPLEASANT INTERVIEW.

"Miss Keith, is that you? Are you going out?"

The voice came from Rose Egerton's room, and Viola paused at the door in passing.

"Only as far as the draper's, to give a message from Mrs. Carr."

"Then, perhaps, you won't mind doing something for me. I do so want the last volume of "Love and Life." Will you change it for me at Smith's bookstall? I have this horrid cold, and mamma and Olive will not be home till night, and it is so frightfully dull shut up here all alone."

Viola glanced out of the window; the station was not exactly the place she would have chosen to frequent at this time of day, for the short winter afternoon was already at an end, and the dusk was gathering.

Rose noticed her hesitation. "Yes; I know mamma does not allow us to go there so late, but we are well known here; it is different for you, a stranger. I would send if I could, but Thomas is out with the carriage, and Susan has a face-ache, and the rest are too busy."

Viola's good nature would not allow her to make further objection. She took up the volume, saying cheerfully: "Well, I will go at once, before it gets darker."

"Stay, Miss Keith," cried Rose, as if in afterthought; "Captain Kane talked of going to town by the express this afternoon. If you should see him at the station, will you give him this note? I particularly want it to reach him before he starts."

There was a nervous excitement very foreign to her usual composure in Rose's manner, which struck Viola as strange. She was feverish, perhaps, from her cold, which might also account for her flushed cheeks. This second commission did not make the first more palatable; but she had no real ground for refusing so simple a request, and reluctantly took the letter.

"Thanks; I am so much obliged. It is really quite light out of doors, I think, but the Close is so gloomy."

The dusk and gloom of the Close seemed to have communicated themselves to the rest of St. Brenda's. The shop people were already lighting their lamps; and when Viola, having hastily given her message at the draper's, began briskly to climb the long slope to the station, which lay just out of the town, it was too dark to distinguish one passer-by from another. But the station gained, all was life and bustle. The express was nearly due and the passengers for town were assembling; hurrying towards the ticket-office, looking after luggage, providing themselves with newspapers.

Viola edged her way through the busy knots of people to the bookstall, and after waiting some minutes, at last succeeded in

getting attention. Then she looked round for Captain Kane. The station was fully lighted, but she walked from end to end of the platform without seeing anything of him. A sensation of relief came over her, and she was just debating if she might consider herself free to go, when he came hurrying in, looked round hastily, and espying her, went at once to meet her.

"This is quite too good of you, Miss Keith! You have —— Ah, thanks," as she silently handed him the note. "My friends in the Close are all well, I hope? And Miss Rose—is her cold better?"

"No, worse; she has been obliged to put off her visit to town for a few days. Lady Mary will not hear of her travelling while her throat is still so troublesome."

"Ah! quite right; she must take care of herself." But, as Viola perceived, an unmistakable shadow crossed his face. "I am off to town myself by this train, and dine with my uncle at his club to-night. Miss Rose may like to know that he talks of returning to-morrow, a day earlier than he intended."

"I will tell her," said Viola.

"And will you please give her this little packet at the same time? I was just wondering where to find a trustworthy messenger."

He spoke with a would-be carelessness, but with a furtive glance at his companion, which went unperceived. A close observer might also have noticed the look of relief which passed over his countenance as she accepted his commission, bade him good-bye, and turned to go. But he detained her.

"One moment, Miss Keith. Come this way out of the crowd," leading her to a more retired part of the platform. "Will you please arrange that Miss Rose is alone when you give her that note? I know ladies have ways of managing such things."

"Some ladies, perhaps, but I am not one of them, Captain Kane," said Viola, her sleeping suspicions at once roused again. "If such secresy is necessary, you must take your packet back. I will have nothing to do with any underhand proceedings."

He grew pale with suppressed rage, and a sneer disfigured his handsome features as he said, quietly and cuttingly: "I should have thought Miss — Keith the very best person to apply to, under the circumstances; but your virtuous indignation does you credit. Of course, it is only assumed—you cannot be in earnest in refusing to oblige me?"

"And why not?" Viola asked, haughtily. She could almost hear her heart beat, but tried to preserve at least an outward calm. He bent lower, and looked with a malicious smile into her face, where the colour was beginning to rise.

"Do you forget that you are in my power? One word of mine will entirely change your position here. Shall I speak that word?"

"As you please," she answered, proudly. "It will not be necessary, as I shall anticipate you by myself telling Lady Mary the whole

story. I have some spirit left, and I will neither be bribed nor intimidated. Here is your packet."

"Brava! Spoken like a heroine. But a truce to these heroics, which are quite uncalled for. Give me my letter. I can find another messenger, no doubt; and, after all, it is quite unimportant."

He gave an embarrassed laugh, which tried hard to sound natural, and, with the letter, took her hand for a moment. "Come, Viola, I was only in jest. Let us be friends again, and forget our little differences."

"Friends we shall never be, Captain Kane; but we may manage to keep the peace if you will remember in future that I am not accustomed to be addressed by my Christian name in such familiar fashion. Let me go, please."

She resolutely withdrew her hand from his clasp, and drawing herself up, turned away, and quickly threaded the crowd, never slackening speed till she found herself once more retracing her steps towards the town, and cooling her flushed cheeks in the refreshing night air. In her preoccupation she did not notice three ladies, who turned to look after her in wonder as she left the station.

"There, mamma! I told you so! I thought she was not as quiet as she looks!" exclaimed the eldest Miss Warburton, as Viola disappeared.

"I detest the 'still-deep fast;' don't you, Tilly?" said her sister, cuttingly. "I'm sorry for Captain Kane, too. He's not a bad sort."

The railway bell rang suddenly, close in their ears. There was a prolonged whistle, and the express dashed into the station. Captain Kane flung himself into a first-class carriage.

"She shall pay for this!" he muttered, savagely. "Let her run the length of her tether first, though, before she is pulled up. The girl has a confounded deal of spirit—and how distractingly pretty she looked!"

Mrs. Warburton, as we have seen, made it her proud boast that she came of Raleigh blood, and could claim cousinship with Lady Mary herself. True, the branch whence she sprang had been early lopped off the family tree; but it was none the less true that her paternal great-grand-uncle had once figured among the collaterals clustering beneath the Castlemaine coronet in "Lodge's Peerage." Even this faint aroma of nobility hanging about her stood her in good stead outside the Close gates; but the remote Raleigh connection had not served as a passport to intimacy with Lady Mary, as she once had hoped. Lady Mary was indeed exclusive to a degree. A very small proportion of her numerous acquaintance were admitted to her friendship. And the few among them who were allowed to pass beyond the limit of formal visiting in the large drawing-room to a friendly talk over a cup of tea in Lady Mary's own especial sanctum, valued the right much as the haute noblesse of the French Court esteemed the privilege of the tabouret. Needless to say,

Mrs. Warburton was not one of these chosen few. Her orbit was, indeed, an extreme outer circle, far removed from the great central sun whose favouring beams she coveted. Lady Mary was grandly courteous when they met, and once a year included Mrs. Warburton's rather fast daughters in her largest garden party: and there the acquaintance reached its limit.

There was certainly nothing about the girls to attract Lady Mary's fastidious eye. Nature had endowed Bella and Tilly Warburton with the sallow complexion appertaining to brunettes; but as each in her turn approached maturity, art supplied them with a surface veneer, supposed to represent the pink-and-white bloom of a blonde. Art also pencilled their eyebrows, and laid a deep shade beneath their eyelids suggestive of melancholy thought, which process also enhanced the brilliancy of their somewhat lack-lustre eyes. But art seemed to have reserved her embellishments for the surface, and certainly had not attempted either to develop or adorn Nature in the inner woman of the Warburton girls; so that the great qualities of head and heart, doubtless descended from the noble Raleigh stem, at present lay dormant and unsuspected within them.

Perhaps the consciousness that they themselves lived in a glass-house, very assailable by malicious pebbles, made the enjoyment of indulging their secret grudge against Lady Mary, by throwing a stone at one of her household, all the more keen to the Warburtons. It is certain none of the three stayed their hand; and the little scene which the mother and daughters had witnessed at the station, embellished, exaggerated, and misinterpreted, formed the topic of talk at many tea-tables during the next few days.

A fire was blazing in Rose Egerton's room, trying to vie in brightness with the flames of two tall candles on the mantelpiece, which shed a becoming light upon the pretty face of its owner, as she moved restlessly about it, unable to settle to anything. Even the volume of "Love and Life," so much desired a few hours since, lay face downward upon the table, still unfinished.

The decorations of Rose's sanctum were after the approved fashion of the day, and the quaint old room offered a fine field for the display of a liberal and impartial taste, only limited in its indulgence by the extent of her pocket-money. Brackets of sundry materials projected in divers shapes and sizes from every corner of the room, and from the side walls also, wherever a break in the range of panelled cupboards, which were the glory of the corner house, permitted; plates and plaques of china, subjects various, filled up the interstices. Upon the brackets, a perfect menagerie of diminutive animals, in the same perishable material, disported themselves amid vases, cups and receptacles of every period.

In the midst of this chaos of ornament, with no method in the madness of its disposition, Rose wandered, uncheered and disconsolate,

until, as nine strokes sounded from a little travelling clock, watched over on its bracket by a small representation in bronze of the Great Napoleon, came a tap at the door, followed by the entrance of Mrs. Carr's companion.

Rose brightened up. "This is kind of you, Miss Keith! I was just wishing for someone to come and enliven my solitude. Thank you so much for the book, which Susan brought me. Won't you sit down?"

Rose pushed a tempting little low chair closer to the fire, and as she did so, asked carelessly: "Did you see anything of Captain Kane at the station?"

"Yes; I gave him the note." Viola remained standing, ignoring Rose's invitation.

"And there was no answer?"

"There was a packet, but ——" Viola made an effort, and spoke out bravely. "I refused to bring it, because—Miss Egerton! Please don't think me disobliging; but I hope you will never ask me again to do what I did this afternoon. That was what I came to say. Good-night."

Rose's fair face became suffused with colour, but curiously enough, she attempted no remonstrance. Only as Viola reached the door she recovered herself.

"I am sorry to have troubled you; it shall not occur again," she said, quietly. "May I ask you to say nothing about the matter, either to my mother—or, anyone else? She might be displeased."

"You may depend upon me," answered Viola, rather proudly. "I shall not give it another thought. Good-night."

(To be continued.)

SONNET.

THERE is a moaning in the midnight sky
Of winds that have no resting and no pleasure,
Like witches wailing o'er a vanished treasure
Hoarded in hope their forfeit souls to buy.
Nought else disturbs, except the night-bird's cry,
The silence of my sad and lonely leisure,
And in a life that moments cannot measure
I live again the days that are gone by.
Gone by? The dark mysterious past appals me!
Where are they gone, those days that are no more?
My heart's a sepulchre that only keeps
Their skeleton—the memory that enthralls me.
Surely their spirit somewhere doth endure,
And only till the Resurrection sleeps.

A. M. H.

A PAINTER'S VENGEANCE.

By Mary E. Penn.

THIRTY years ago the Belgian painter, Antoine Wiertz, was astonishing the artistic world by the powerful but extravagant productions which are now exhibited at Brussels in the Museum which bears his name.

Though his brush was generally occupied with classical subjects, or weird allegorical designs such as the "Contest between Good and Evil," he occasionally consented to paint portraits. This was a favour, however, which he only accorded to those whose physiognomy happened to interest him. It may be added that his taste inclined rather to the grotesque and eccentric than the beautiful.

One day he received a visit from a certain M. van Spach, a notary, who had been seized with the desire to have his features perpetuated by the celebrated artist. Maître van Spach—a dry, wrinkled, keen-eyed old gentleman, with an expression of mingled shrewdness and self-importance—was one of the wealthiest men in Brussels, and as avaricious as he was rich; a characteristic which had procured him the nickname of "Maître Harpagon."

Wiertz was aware of his visitor's failing; nevertheless he acceded to his request without demur. The fact was, he had been conquered at first sight by the old scrivener's picturesque head. That head was a perfect treasure to an artist, with its bald cranium, wrinkled forehead, shaggy brows overhanging the small piercing eyes, hooked nose, and thin-lipped mouth, which shut like a trap. Wiertz was fascinated, and while his visitor was pompously explaining his wishes, the artist was taking mental note of every line and feature.

"How much will the portrait cost?" was the notary's cautious inquiry.

"My terms are ten thousand francs, Monsieur," was the reply.

The lawyer started, stared incredulously, shrugged his shoulders, and took up his hat. "In that case," he answered drily, "I have only to wish you good morning."

Alarmed at the prospect of losing this promising "subject," whom he had already in imagination transferred to canvas, Wiertz hastened to add: "Those are my usual terms; but as your face interests me, I am willing to make a reduction in your favour. Suppose we say five thousand?"

But M. van Spach still objected, urging that such a sum was exorbitant for "a strip of painted canvas."

At length, after much bargaining and hesitation, he agreed to pay three thousand francs for the portrait—"frame included;" and this being settled, he rose to take leave.

"When am I to give you the first sitting?" he inquired.

"There is no hurry," replied the artist, who had his own intentions regarding this portrait. "I am somewhat occupied just now, but will let you know when I have a morning at liberty. Au revoir!"

The moment his visitor had left the studio Wiertz seized palette and brushes, placed a fresh canvas on his easel, and dashed in the outlines of the portrait from memory. He painted as if for a wager, while the summer daylight lasted; and, thanks to his marvellous rapidity of execution, when evening came the picture was all but finished.

He had represented the old Notary seated at a table, strewn with papers and parchments, his full face turned towards the spectator. The head was brought out in masterly relief against a shadowed background, and painted in the artist's best style; bold, free and unconventional, showing no signs of its hurried execution. The likeness was striking in its fidelity, giving not only the features, but the character and expression of the original, so that the canvas seemed instinct with life.

The following morning Wiertz gave the finishing touches to his work, put it in a frame, and despatched it to Van Spach; instructing the messenger to wait for an answer.

He rubbed his hands with pleasure as he pictured the old gentleman's delight and astonishment, and anticipated the sensation which this tour de force would create in artistic circles.

In due time the messenger returned—with the picture in one hand, and a note in the other. Wiertz hastily dismissed him, opened the letter, and read as follows:

"Sir,—I beg to return your extraordinary production, which I cannot suppose is intended for my portrait, as it bears no sort of resemblance to me.

In art, as in everything else, I like to have my money's worth for my money, and I do not choose to pay you the sum of three thousand francs for one afternoon's work. As you do not consider me worth the trouble of painting seriously, I must decline any further transactions with you, and remain, Sir,

"Yours obediently,

"Peter van Spach."

When the artist recovered from his astonishment at this remarkable epistle, he burst into a fit of laughter which made the studio ring.

"His money's worth—ha, ha! Maître Harpagon has over-reached himself for once. He could have sold it for five times what it cost him—the benighted old Philistine!"

He placed the rejected picture once more on the easel, and regarded it long and critically, only to become more convinced of its merit. He knew that art-judges would pronounce it a chef-d'œuvre. His amusement began to give place to irritation at the indignity to

which his work had been subjected, and vague projects of vengeance rose before him as he paced the floor, with bent head and knitted brows.

Suddenly he stopped short, his eyes sparkling with mischievous satisfaction at an idea which had suddenly occurred to him. He took up his palette, and set to work upon the picture again, adroitly altering and retouching.

In an incredibly short space of time it underwent a startling metamorphosis. While carefully preserving the likeness, he had altered the face by exaggerating its characteristics; giving a cunning leer to the deeply-set eyes, a grimmer curve to the thin lips, and a scowl to the heavy brows. A stubbly beard appeared on the chin, and the attitude became drooping and decrepit.

Then the notary's accessories vanished, the background becoming the wall of a cell, with a barred window; while the table, with its litter of papers and parchments, was transformed into a rough bench, beneath which might be discerned a pitcher and a loaf.

When this was achieved to his satisfaction, the artist signed his work, and gummed on the frame a conspicuous label, with the inscription:—"Imprisoned for Debt."

Then he sent for a fiacre, and drove to Melchior's, the well-known picture-dealer in the Rue de la Madeleine, whose window offers such constant attraction to lovers of art.

"I have something to show you," began Wiertz. "I have just finished this study, which I think is fairly successful. Can you find room for it in your window?"

"Find room for it? I should think so!" exclaimed the dealer, enthusiastically. "My dear fellow, it is first-rate! I have seen nothing of yours more striking and original—and that is saying much. What price do you put upon it?"

"I have not yet decided," replied the painter. "Give it a good place in the window, and if a purchaser presents himself let me know."

The picture was immediately installed in the place of honour, and soon attracted a curious group. All day Melchior's window was surrounded; and next morning the papers noticed the wonderful picture, and sent fresh crowds to gaze at it.

Among the rest was a friend of Maître van Spach, who could hardly believe his eyes on recognising the worthy notary in this "questionable shape." He hastened at once to inform him of the liberty which had been taken with his person; and not long afterwards the old lawyer burst into the shop, startling its proprietor, who at once recognized the original of the famous picture.

"M. Melchior," began the intruder, "I have been made the victim of a shameful practical joke by one of your clients. It is my portrait, sir, that hangs in your window; it is I, sir—I, Maître van Spach—who am held up to ridicule in that infamous daub—pilloried for all the

world to see as an imprisoned bankrupt! If the thing is not at once removed, I shall apply to the police."

At this threat the picture-dealer merely smiled. "I must refer you to the artist, Monsieur," he returned, coolly. "The picture belongs to him, and I cannot remove it without his permission."

To Wiertz's house went Maître van Spach, in a white heat of rage and indignation. On entering the studio, he found the painter lounging in an arm-chair, smoking his afternoon cigar.

"Ah, it is you, Maître?" was his bland greeting. "To what fortunate circumstance am I indebted for this visit? Pray take a seat. Do you smoke? You will find those cigars excellent."

"Monsieur," interrupted the notary, cutting short these courtesies with scant ceremony: "let us come to the point. There is at this moment in Melchior's window a picture—a caricature—which makes me the laughing stock of the town. I insist on its being taken out at once—at once, do you understand?"

"Not quite," replied the other imperturbably. "It is true there is a picture of mine at Melchior's, but I really don't see how it makes *you* ridiculous."

"You don't see?—But that picture is my portrait, sir—my portrait!" cried his visitor, rapping his cane upon the floor.

"Your portrait?" echoed the other, with a look of surprise.

"Of course it is, as anyone can see at a glance. You ——"

"But—excuse me," the painter interrupted, "you said yesterday that it did not resemble you in the least. See—here is your letter to that effect."

Van Spach coloured and bit his lip. He felt that he was caught.

"Such being the case," continued Wiertz, "and the work being returned on my hands, I have a perfect right to dispose of it to the best advantage."

The notary took a turn across the room, to recover his composure.

"Come," he said, at length, forcing a smile, "let us try to arrange this ridiculous affair amicably. I will give you the three thousand francs at once, and take the horrible thing out of the window ——"

"Stay a moment," interrupted his companion, as he flicked the ashes from his cigar, and carelessly changed his position. "You must be aware that the picture in its present shape is ten times more valuable than a mere portrait. It is now a work of imagination and invention, and I may own that I consider it one of my most successful canvases. I could not think of parting with it for less than fifteen thousand francs."

The notary gasped. "Fifteen thousand francs! You are joking!"

"Not at all. That is my price; you may take it or leave it."

There was a moment's pause; then the visitor turned on his heel.

"I leave it, then! Go to the deuce with your picture!" he retorted, as he left the room, banging the door behind him.

He had not gone many yards from the house, however, when he

stopped short and reflected. So long as that ill-omened canvas remained on view in Melchior's window he would not know a moment's peace. The story would be sure to get wind, and even his friends would join in the laugh against him. He would hardly dare to show his face abroad. At any sacrifice, this scandal must be stopped. But—fifteen thousand francs! He fairly groaned as he reluctantly retraced his steps towards the house.

"Monsieur Wiertz," he began, in a conciliatory tone, "I have reconsidered the matter, and—and I agree to your terms. I will take your picture for the sum you named."

Wiertz threw away his cigar, and rose.

"Monsieur, you are very kind. But it happens that I, too, have been considering, and a brilliant idea has occurred to me."

The notary shuddered. He dreaded Wiertz's "ideas," and he had a presentiment that some fresh disaster was in store for him.

"What is it?" he asked, nervously.

"As my picture seems to have made a sensation, I think I shall advertise it to be raffled for at five francs a ticket, and, that all the town may have a chance of seeing it, I shall hire a commissionaire to carry it through the streets for a day or two. Not a bad notion, —eh?"

Maître van Spach was speechless with consternation. "You—you would not do that?" he stammered.

"Why not? I am confident the plan would succeed—so confident that I wouldn't give it up for less than thirty thousand francs—money down."

The unfortunate notary burst into a cold perspiration, and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief. To see himself trotted round Brussels on a porter's back, labelled "Imprisoned for Debt!" It was like a horrible nightmare.

"Here," he exclaimed, desperately, taking out his pocket-book—"here is a cheque for the amount. For heaven's sake, let me have the picture, and I will say no more about it."

Half an hour afterwards the detestable canvas was in his possession; but it was not until he had cut it out of the frame and burnt it to ashes that he felt himself safe from some fresh manifestation of the painter's vengeance.

Meantime, Wiertz cashed the cheque, and after deducting the sum of ten thousand francs—the price he had first demanded — forwarded the rest to the charitable fund of the town in the name of Maître van Spach.

R. AND E. TAYLOR. M. ELLEN STAPLES.

"MRS. HATHERLEY ABSOLUTELY HAD THE EFFRONTERY TO HINT THAT IT MIGHT BE DICK," WOUND UP GEORGIE.

THE ARGOSY.

JUNE, 1883.

WINIFRED POWER.

CHAPTER XVI.

SECRETS AND SURPRISES.

FROM the closed door of the box-room came a low muttering that was sufficiently uncanny.

Sir John advanced and turned the handle. The door did not yield, for it was locked; but instantly the muttering ceased.

"The key!" commanded the master of the house. Shaking all over, Mrs. Hatherley produced it from her pocket. Sir John unlocked the room and entered; as many as could reach peering curiously over his shoulder. The room was unlighted; but the gas-lamp in the passage illuminated it partially, and flashed upon the pale face and crouching form of a youth, lying huddled up on a mattress in one corner of the room. It was young William Hatherley. Judging by his excited air and wildly-staring eyes, as well as by the sounds that they had heard, he was in the delirious stage of a fever. At sight of him his sisters burst into tears; but his mother, released from all necessity of secrecy at last, approached him, and began soothing him with a passion of affection that was infinitely piteous.

"What is the matter with him? How long has he been in this state?" enquired Mark, in consternation.

"He has been here hardly a week," explained the mother. "When he first came he was only weak from want of food. But one evening he slipt out in the rain—it was so lonely for him here—" she said, with a kind of resentment, "and got wet to the skin. And since yesterday he has been delirious.—Oh, my boy! my boy!"

"Where did he go when he went out in the rain?" asked Sir John, sardonically.

Nobody answered; and the speaker's eyes ranged interrogatively over the faces of his hearers.

"The keeper of the Blue Dragon told me that Mr. William Hatherley had been there one evening. Of course, he did not know

he was hiding here," added Susan, enchanted to be of importance.

"Just as I expected!" commented Sir John. "Exposure and want do a great deal, but dissipation does more."

"The first thing to be done now is to send for a doctor, and put the lad into a decent bed," said Mark—and he spoke sternly.

"A mattress was all I could get brought in," whimpered Mrs. Hatherley, with characteristic want of logic, detecting some implied blame to herself in her nephew's observations.

Sir John seized hold directly of her incautious words. "Somebody must have been Mrs. Hatherley's accomplice in this," he said sharply. "Who was it?"

A dead silence.

"How long ago is it since you first began to hear noises here?" This question was addressed to Susan.

"Continuous, sir, I have only noticed them these four or five days. But off and on there have been queer things all the winter."

"And then we wonder that my Psalter is stolen!" exclaimed Sir John, and shrugged his shoulders impatiently at Mark's low-toned protest—"Father!"

"William is no thief!" cried Mrs. Hatherley, turning almost savagely upon her brother-in-law.

"Liars and deceivers may easily be thieves. I shall take the night to reflect upon all this. And to-morrow I shall decide upon the measures to be taken for recovering my property and "—(with a sneer)—"purifying my house."

And having thus spoken, Sir John descended the stairs.

Through Mark's care, Dolly energetically aiding, a doctor was sent for, and William was removed to a proper room. The doctor did not think very badly of the patient, but administered a sedative, and recommended quiet and care.

A very sharp investigation on the part of Sir John established the fact that Mrs. Hatherley's accomplice had been the butler: who was forthwith dismissed. He admitted that William Hatherley had once or twice before during the winter slept in the house; and the date of one of these sojourns corresponded nearly enough to the hypothetical date of the disappearance of the Psalter. This fact Sir John was never tired of hinting at, working Dolly almost to a frenzy by it, and reducing Florence to helpless tears. Mrs. Hatherley took the insult with comparative tameness; for in her purblind, foolish way, she was apparently incapable, for the moment, of seeing an inch beyond the delightful circumstance that she had at last her son openly under the same roof as herself, and could lavish her fondness on him. Thanks to Mark's steady partisanship, no necessary care was wanting to him, and in a very few days he began to recover with all the elasticity of the incurable ne'er-do-weel.

For years William Hatherley had been a thorn in the side of his family,

and was looked upon by all of them, except his adoring mother, with the scantest favour possible. He had been expelled from school; and after an interval of idling, had tried one situation after another, only to lose them all. Lazy, insolent and dissipated, he had disgusted every friend he possessed. Long ago Sir John had refused to have anything more to do with him, and Mark, although more merciful, now that mercy was a duty, had not shown himself one whit more indulgent. But however great his scorn at an ignoble form of dissipation, he could not bring himself to share his father's professed views as to the disappearance of the Psalter. His doubts, indeed, arose less from any belief in William's honesty, than from the utter absence of proof. To his upright mind, there was no more reason at present for accusing one person in the house than another. He could not understand why his father would not sift the matter with the help of the police, and fasten the charge upon someone. "It is intolerable to me to live in the midst of all these vague suspicions," he frequently said, and with growing impatience. "I do entreat, sir, that you will take some steps in the business. In this way, you will neither recover your Psalter nor detect the thief. It is inconceivable that you should care so little for an object of such value."

Sir John gave one of his mysterious, disagreeable smiles.

"I believe my uncle would prefer not to discover the thief. He would rather like William to be the scapegoat," suddenly said Dolly.

It was at breakfast that this daring remark was made, and a thunderbolt falling upon the table could not have caused more utter consternation. Sir John glared at his audacious niece with an ire which gained enormously in force from speechless, sheer amazement. Had the tea-urn all at once bounded up and struck him, he could not have been more astonished. Dorothy took his Medusa-like glance with much intrepidity, although the colour deepened in her peach-like cheeks. Mrs. Hatherley shrank together as if all the breath had been taken out of her body, and Flossie turned as pale as a sheet.

"Will you be so good as to repeat that observation?" Sir John requested, in slow, portentous tones.

"I don't think there is any necessity for repeating it," replied Dolly, promptly. "I think you all heard it."

"Leave the room," commanded her uncle.

"Certainly." She rose and made for the door.

"Oh stop!" cried out her mother. "John, don't be angry with her. She did not mean—she does not know ——"

"I do mean. I do know," exclaimed Dolly, passionately turning and facing them all. "I mean that it is far better for us all to go and beg our bread through the streets, than to stay here on sufferance, and be insulted for our pains. I know that we are neither welcome nor wanted. I know that the food we put in our mouths is grudged to us; that our word is not believed, nor our feelings considered, and

that the only use we are of in the house is just to—to be made *cats'-paws!*"

At this point, Dolly's flaming eyes fixed themselves on Gertrude. Her eloquence, having exhausted its venom, abruptly ceased.

"As far as I am concerned," replied Sir John, icily, "you can all of you go to-morrow."

Upon this, a storm of sobs broke from Mrs. Hatherley; Flossie shivered; and her sister, not quite sure of what might be going to happen to her, escaped with trepidation upstairs.

For the rest of the day, the atmosphere in the house was charged with electricity. Poor Dolly was out of favour with everybody, except, indeed, Gertrude Dallas: who, rather diverted than otherwise at her outbreak, treated her with a patronising kind of admiration, that nearly drove her wild. Mark, although he, too, was secretly amused (never having expected such revolt from Dolly) was still far too great a stickler for authority to encourage his little cousin in rebellion: while as for Mrs. Hatherley and Flossie they were simply scared out of all power of judging. The bare notion of being driven from The Limes, and of having to face hardship and effort, made them shiver; and Sir John's wrath fell upon them like a blight.

He was to the last degree incensed; walked up and down his library, declaring that they should go—go; and would listen for a long time neither to reasoning nor entreaty. Mark, in vain at first, tried to point out to him that the general discomfort of the family relations arose primarily from the missing Psalter, and would never cease until that mystery was elucidated. In vain William Hatherley himself, fairly convalescent now, shuffled into the library, and, with a kind of sulky earnestness, protested his innocence; and with a kind of feeble resentment, demanded that, in common justice, some effort should be made to discover the thief. Sir John was obstinate; glowered at the petitioners, and said he knew what to think. But when this kind of thing had lasted for a day or two and everybody but Gertrude (who remained as cool as a cucumber) was worked up to the highest pitch of nervous irritation, Sir John, as if suddenly yielding, spoke.

"Very well, I will advertise." He said it in a tone which plainly conveyed that his concession was wrung from him by entreaty, and was in no way suggested by conviction. But he persisted still in managing the matter himself privately, and without any intervention from the police.

A day or two later, an advertisement, very cautiously worded, appeared in the *Times*. It stated that a thirteenth century Psalter had disappeared from a private collection, and that a reward of twenty pounds would be offered for its recovery.

A week elapsed, and no answer came. Then the advertisement was renewed.

Meanwhile things at The Limes, except for the sullen airs of

William Hatherley, and a brooding presence of suspicion, had resumed their usual course.

At the end of a few days more, Sir John received an answer dated —— Paris, and signed, Clémence Suchard. The writer revealed herself as the housekeeper of a celebrated bibliophile, lately deceased, of the name of Morel, and stated that she believed herself able to throw some light upon the missing Psalter. Her attention had only just been drawn to the advertisement, or she would have written before. On a particular evening in February, almost immediately after the siege was raised, her late master had received a visit from a young man, short, dark and thin, who had offered him an illuminated MS. for sale. Her master was very ill at the time, and she, unwilling that he should be excited, had hovered about the library so as to give the visitor warning to depart at the first signs of undue agitation. In this way, she had caught some of the conversation, and gathered that the Psalter was a very old, curious and valuable one. For the rest, she had not seen the MS., nor was she at all sure that her master had bought it. The young man had been requested by him to return on the following morning, and had done so; but on that occasion Madame Suchard was out, and could not tell what had happened. Her master usually told her when he bought anything particularly precious; but in the last weeks of his life, he was much altered, and inclined to make a mystery of everything he did. He had possessed a number of illuminated MSS., and all would shortly be for sale. Meanwhile, if the owner of the missing Psalter would give a detailed description, Madame Suchard might be able to afford him more accurate information.

This letter, which arrived at breakfast-time, was read aloud by Sir John, all the members of the family being present (except Gertrude, who was generally late, and William who, in virtue of his past semi-invalidism, and because his presence was detestable to his uncle, still had his meals in his room). A slight smile of triumph curled Mrs. Hatherley's lips, "Short, dark and thin. The description corresponds exactly."

"To whom?" asked Sir John, fixing his cold eyes upon her.

"I don't think I need say to whom."

"I wish you to say it."

"To Mr. Richard Dallas, then," replied Mrs. Hatherley, with a movement of her head.

Her brother-in-law smiled unpleasantly. "Several young men are dark, short and thin. William is, for instance."

The colour rushed into Mrs. Hatherley's face. "Again!" she exclaimed, in a choked voice.

"But William was not in Paris in February," observed Mark, who had looked a little staggered on hearing the letter read.

"How do we know where he was?" retorted his father, sharply. "Do we ever know where he is, or what he does, or by what means he earns or otherwise obtains his livelihood?"

A pause. Mrs. Hatherley and Florence were speechless with agitation, while, as for poor Dolly, she was white to the lips. To her it was no consolation to think that, instead of her brother, Richard Dallas might be the thief. Her own mental explanation was a very different one. She believed that her uncle had made a present of the Psalter to Gertrude!

"I am unwilling to suspect anybody," resumed Mark; "but you cannot deny, sir, that the coincidence of the offer to M. Morel of the Psalter with the date of Dallas's departure from this house is a striking and significant one."

"I see no coincidence," replied Sir John. "When Dallas left me he did not go to Paris, but to The Hague. Of this I have proofs in his own letters to me, and in his family's letters to his sister."

The conversation was abruptly arrested by the entrance of Gertrude. She came in looking as lovely and as self-possessed as usual, and apologised smilingly for being late, as the gentlemen rose to receive her.

"Any news about the Psalter?" she enquired, carelessly.

Sir John handed her the letter.

She read it with uplifted brows, but even the lynx eyes watching her could detect no sign of agitation or of guilt.

"After all, one does not know if this Psalter be really yours," was her sole remark, addressed to Sir John.

"That is a point which will soon be settled in part. I shall write to an agent in Paris to-day, and instruct him to attend the sale."

As a result of this move, Sir John announced after another fortnight that his Psalter was *not* among those belonging to M. Morel's collection. "At the same time, that does not prove," he added, "that it was not the one offered."

This there was no denying, and the mystery remained as great as ever. Again Mark asked his father what he intended to do, and again he was met by the answer that, in all probability no further steps would be taken. Urged by his son to state the cause of this inaction, Sir John merely answered that, however obnoxious certain members of his family might be to him, he yet had some respect for the dignity of his name. This, of course, meant that he still suspected William; but to Mark his obstinacy in this regard was inexplicable, on every hypothesis except one, from which his loyal nature shrank. The idea had at times presented itself to him that Sir John hoped, by constant hinting at his secret convictions, to wear out the Hatherleys' patience, and drive them from the house. William had already left it in dudgeon, amid floods of tears from his mother; and while Mark could not pretend to regret *him*, he was too chivalrous not to be revolted by the notion of seeing his aunt and her daughters turned adrift. So capricious a change of conduct, after years of generosity, would be too heartless, and but a little time back Mark could not, even for a moment, have thought his father capable of it.

But Sir John was strangely altered: harder—more bitter—more mocking—and stonily reserved. What had worked this change Mark was perplexed to think: first one explanation, then another presented itself to him, and there was one which recurred oftener and dwelt longer in his mind than all the rest.

In the midst of these perplexities, a letter arrived from Paris, announcing that Mr. Russell was dying, and this was quickly followed by a telegram with the news that he was dead. Some notice had to be taken of the event, of course; and, as Sir John curtly stated that his health would not allow him to attend the funeral, it was decided that Mark should go. He was rather angry with himself to find that the idea of meeting Winifred again did not displease him; but he was careful to conceal the discovery under the most impenetrable reserve.

Mark was ascending the stairs to begin his preparations for an immediate journey, when he was stopped on his way by Dorothy. Worn out and grieved, more than anybody guessed, by the events of the past few weeks, the poor little thing looked like the ghost of her once winsome self; and Mark, awaking with a man's tardy perception to the fact, glanced at her with a new-born pity. She raised her eyes supplicatingly to his face, and begged him to let her go with him to Paris.

"It is no favour," she added. "In this way my uncle will be released from one, at least, of his burdens."

"Burdens! Why, what nonsense!" said Mark, kindly, yet a little disconcerted, for did not the speech tally with his own secret thoughts? "You can come if you really wish it, Dolly; but things in Paris are beginning to look rather black. You could not stay there if any political troubles broke out."

Dolly could stay as well as Winifred, she said, or go with her wherever she went. The future did not matter; it was only the present that was intolerable, and leave The Limes she must. Mark listened thoughtfully, very well disposed to sympathise with her, yet unwilling to discourage her energy. Might she not really be cast off one day, and have to earn he rown livelihood? Nevertheless, he was averse to any hurried decision. "Why not wait a little," he at length asked.

"I have waited long enough," cried Dolly, and clasped her hands with a distress that was positively pathetic. "Everything is too odious. That detestable Miss Dallas!" she whispered. Then, detecting the dawn of a protest in her cousin's face, she added, passionately: "Mark, I believe my uncle has given *her* the Psalter, and does not choose to confess it."

Mark stepped backwards startled. The idea was fantastic, but in the darkness pervading the affair, any suggestion, however unlikely, seemed like a ray of light. He promised Dolly that she should go with him; bade her pack up, and engaged, as soon as his own preparations were completed, to announce her departure to Sir John. On enter-

ing the library an hour later for this purpose, he had not crossed the threshold before he stood rooted to the spot with surprise. For erect by the old man's chair, flushed and triumphant, was Gertrude. And with both her hands clasped in his, Sir John was looking up into her face, and speaking rapidly, his own countenance aglow with an expression which told its own tale. After his first stare of amazement, Mark prepared to beat a retreat; but his father called him back, and, with a solemnity not to be described, informed him that in Miss Dallas he beheld the future mistress of The Limes.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BEST SLEEP OF ALL.

With a heavy heart, Winifred had gone upon her lonely journey, and reached the altered Paris, so full to her of associations and of memories that had turned to ghosts. The closing terrible scenes of the Commune were still in the future; but the siege had left moral as well as material traces which she was quick to note. But more than this, she herself was changed; and the hundred familiar sights and sounds, recalling her so abruptly to a life which had lost its old charm, were fraught with a restlessness that yet was not all pain, but was born of the contrast between the present and the past.

Winifred, her face still turned expectant towards the light of a magic dawn, was tuned up to a pitch of endeavour that made all the traversed years seem paltry to her. In this solemn yet excited mood, she crossed the threshold of her old home, involuntarily vowing to herself as she did so that she would stoop to no compromise, nor descend an inch from her stand-point. How she should meet Mrs. Russell was rather a problem to her: she hoped almost that she might see her uncle first. But at the door of the sick-room the two women met.

"I am glad you are come," said Mary, ungraciously. "I am quite worn out with nursing. And, ungrateful though you are, I suppose you will still have the conscience to do something for your uncle."

Winifred recoiled. She expected Mrs. Russell to have been informed by Sir John of her conduct, and she was prepared for reproach, and even a certain amount of vituperation. But this cold, almost offensive assumption of her selfishness, this unquestioning accusation of callousness to blame and to remorse, took her completely by surprise.

"My one desire is to be with him," she answered gently, nay, quite humbly.

"I am glad to hear it," replied Mary Russell, and swept past her in marked disdain. Winifred, opening the door softly, entered the sick-room and approached the bed whereon her uncle lay. He raised his eyes and looked at her.

"I have been waiting for you, Winifred," he said. "You are come, at last."

"You know how willingly I would have come sooner," she answered, sitting down beside him and taking the wasted hand in hers.

"Your aunt wanted you. And yet, what right, after all, had I to call upon your bright young energies or your precious time?" He spoke dreamily, his eyes fixed far beyond her, as though he were following some train of thought evoked by his own half wistful allusion to her energy and her youth.

"What right?" echoed the girl almost passionately. "What better right could you have than the love you have made me feel for you?"

He smiled. "A good hearing, Winifred. But we laggards in the march of life should not summon the vanguard to our aid."

She found him just as she had always known him—patient, brave, sympathetic with the aspirations and the efforts of others, and full of a tenderly humorous appreciation of the world and its ways. What made the difference in him—a difference so heartrending—was his now unconcealed, unconcealable longing to go. Doubtless it had often possessed him of late years, and the tardiness of its fulfilment had been the heaviest portion of his burden, but she had never guessed how much the knowledge of his mood would strengthen her own sorrow. Still, he, who had ever been so kind — was it possible that he could remain blind to the sadness of loving faces, and insensible to the touch of detaining arms? This was the question that, almost rebelliously, as the days went on, Winifred asked herself in the long watches of the night, as she sat beside the still form, hushed to a composure that wrapped it like a shroud. He did not need much waiting upon, or willingly kept them: but sometimes quite suddenly a paroxysm of pain would seize him, and it was the fear of this that made her never easy unless she watched.

He rallied a little for a time, and would talk to her with something of his old animation; and, Winifred, looking back afterwards to those hours, felt that, in spite of the core of anguish in them, she could not have spared one.

Too rarely, alas! in the turmoil and heat of life, in the clash of selfish strivings and the din of discordant claims, are such high, solemn moments known to us. They vibrate for a space too brief in our souls, then die away like the final faint notes of a psalm.

Winifred was almost always alone with her uncle, for although it could not exactly be said that Mary neglected him, she left the greater part of the nursing to her niece. The husband and wife had never been companions in the best sense of the word; but they had lived together for a quarter of a century, and Mary, the slave of habit, like all indolent persons, shrank from the parting that would rob her of her most indulgent friend. For all her self-complacency,

she had an uneasy fear of loneliness; and the thought that she might occasionally have to exert herself in the future to be quite comfortable, shook her uncertain soul with tremors of vague dread. Between Winifred's bright activity and her husband's intelligence, she had rarely felt the necessity of exertion. But, once alone and thrown upon her own resources, what should she do? This tormenting thought recurred incessantly; and in spite of her resentment, she began again to lean weakly on Winifred, who, finding her often in tears, and touched by the spectacle, met her with an infinity of tenderness and pity.

At last, one day she even approached the subject of Martha Freake. Mrs. Russell immediately broke out into reproachful wailings.

"Everybody was very unkind to her—John—Winifred—they were all the same. No consideration for her. Nobody ever had considered her. Her life had been a martyrdom, one continual struggle with inclination, and all for the sake of gratifying others. Nobody ever knew what she had suffered. Whatever she had done wrong in her life—and it was not much—she had more than expiated it. It would be very hard on people if they were always to be having the follies of their youth cast in their teeth. She had never expected to be in her present position. She might have married brilliantly."

"You could not have married a better man than my uncle," flashed out Winifred, half in indignation, half to stop this sudden outpouring of temper.

"I don't speak of his virtues," retorted Mary, with some asperity, and feeling, perhaps, that people's virtues had often made exorbitant demands upon her. "You need not take me up like that, in your unkind, ill-natured way."

Winifred, rather angry, sat silent until the sound of her aunt's resumed sobbing again struck a chord of compassion in her, when she said gently: "I know that you are displeased with me for many things, but I might, perhaps, be of comfort to you yet, if——" here she hesitated for a moment—"if you would only be just."

"It is not so easy to be just," answered Mary, ungraciously; "especially when one gets no help from those who should encourage one. If my brother John——" she stopped abruptly, as if afraid of committing herself.

"Oh, tell me!" cried Winifred, impetuously, and she seized her reluctant hands. "Dear aunt, be frank with me for once. You admit that there was injustice. You say——"

"I admit nothing," interrupted Mrs. Russell. "What is Martha Freake to you or to me? Why did you not worry John instead of me? I expect you did, only that he would very soon silence you."

She was annoyed at her own incautiousness of speech, and yet the habit of regarding herself as a victim had so far killed all remorse in her, that she would have given Winifred her confidence had she dared.

It was only a half-superstitious dread of John, a vague terror as

sullen as Caliban's, that held her back. She was very angry with him of late, having written often in vain for money; and while still shrinking from any betrayal of him which could seriously compromise herself, she would have revelled in such safe luxury of revenge as consisted in exposing him to Winifred, who would be sure not to use the knowledge in any dangerous way.

The person from whose society Winifred gained most diversion in these sad days was Mrs. Dallas.

That good little woman was quite unchanged. Just as placid as ever; as uncomplainingly incapable of grasping the realities of life; as respectful towards the unaccountable Mr. Dallas; as convinced as of old of the sedative virtues of raspberry jam. It was as good as a comedy to hear her talk about the siege of Paris. She regarded that tremendous event principally in the light of the difficulties which it had thrown in the way of her marketing.

"Fancy, my love, fifteen francs for a fowl; and at last they could not be got even for that."

"I am sure you look as if you had lived on the francs instead of the fowls," said Winifred, laughing. "And what was Mr. Dallas doing all the time?"

"He helped in the defence, and made several valuable suggestions to the authorities, I believe. They have given him the Legion of Honour, and he is more than satisfied."

"I think it is the utter impossibility of doing anything with the honour except wear it, which makes it valuable in papa's eyes," remarked Georgie, who had grown very tall and rather pretty, and looked hungry and sharp, and as pert as ever.

Mrs. Dallas had expressed great pleasure at Gertrude's position.

"Sir John is, I understand, so kind; and it is a great comfort to think of her giving thorough satisfaction to her employers."

This view of Gerty as the conscientious governess was rather trying to Winifred's gravity; but she would not have destroyed the amiable delusion for the world. Consequently, she remained discreetly silent. One day, the conversation turning upon The Limes and its inhabitants, she was presently much surprised at a casual mention by Georgie of the missing manuscript.

"The Psalter lost! Why, Dick, you never told me," exclaimed Winifred, in surprise, to Richard Dallas. She had seen the young man oftener than any of the others, and as he had asked her a good deal about the Hatherleys, it did seem strange that he should have been silent concerning such a loss.

"I never thought about it," returned Dick, with rather an odd smile. Georgie, delighted to be able to relate something, poured forth the whole story as Gertrude's letters had communicated it. "Gerty is convinced that William Hatherley is the thief; while Mrs. Hatherley absolutely had the effrontery to hint that it might be Dick!" she added. With a laugh, Dick rose and began whistling softly to the canaries. He

was evidently sick of the subject, which had been discussed doubtless in the family a hundred times already.

Winifred's knowledge of The Limes and its inhabitants enabled her to fill up many of the outlines of Georgie's story, and she went home thinking curiously about it, and in a brighter, more interested mood than she had known for many a day.

There is a sort of irony about impending sorrow which often seems to seize upon just such moments to deal its final blow.

Winifred knew as soon as the door was opened to her, and before the servant could speak, that her uncle had been summoned. She had been away from him hardly longer than an hour, had left him in a frame of mind genial even for his unfailing sweetness, and now when she returned—what a change! The doctor had been called; Mary, crouched in a chair beside the bed, was sobbing violently; one or two people stood about; and he, the object of all this commotion, lay speechless, and still, save for an occasional quiver of pain.

With one irrepressible sob of agony and awe, Winifred hurried to him, then controlled herself and stood still. Oh! impotence of human love and human effort, what bitterness is like unto thine? Gone, gone all that they had loved and praised in him, the kindly tones, the sparkling wit, the answering glance. Nothing left but this poor body, and in that no life that was not pain. To stand there and do nothing in help was hard; and Winifred wrung her hands together in one passionate, unspoken prayer for the strength to endure to the end. To endure and be silent—last poor achievement of a love which death had mastered.

How long the struggle lasted she never knew. The moments seemed to drop one by one down a silence unending as eternity. Every thought in her was distilled to the longing that he would speak one word to her before he went. At last the mystic wrestle ended; and he opened his eyes and looked round upon them, with the splendour of final renunciation in his transfigured glance. His wife gave a kind of terrified gasp, and sank upon her knees beside the bed; but Winifred drew closer to him and gently put her arms about him. Softly, as she might have clasped a child, she pillowed the noble grey head—grey before its time—upon her breast, and very tenderly, reverently and solemnly, laid her warm young lips upon it in loving, last farewell. He was passing away very quietly now—all struggle over; and, relieved at last from the terrible tension of watching, she felt her eyes fill with tears as she remembered how small had been the measure of happiness in his life. All the pathos of his failure, of his wasted talents and blighted hopes, was present to her; and while her heart swelled with tenderness at the recollection of his gentle fortitude, her love was glad at last that he should be parted from the burden which love could lighten not nor share.

Darkness had already gathered over his sight, but he groped with his hand until it met his wife's bowed head. There his touch rested

kindly, perhaps forgivingly, for all that he had felt and never said. He did not speak even now, although her sobs grew louder; but his instinct, quick to respond even in this supreme moment, possibly comprehended the dumb supplication which caused Winifred's arms to tremble. For he made a movement at last, as if to turn towards her, then even as he murmured, "Do not mourn, dear; I am tired . . . . . glad to go," his head fell backwards on her shoulder, and he went.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"WHERE THOU GOEST I WILL GO."

THE first thought that brought Winifred any comfort after her uncle's death was the recollection of Martha Freake.

In the sad concluding weeks of Mr. Russell's illness she had found no leisure to look for her; now she remembered her as the one human creature, she knew, whose need of solace and of help could solace her own boundless desolation.

Her aunt's peevish grief only worried her: such weak complainings jarred on the solemn silence that loss had left in her own aching heart. Visitors, also, were constantly coming in, and Mary saw them all. In the platitudes of consolation offered by them, suggestions as to mourning, and conversation regarding the delayed funeral, Mrs. Russell constantly forgot her sorrow. The anticipation of Sir Charles Russell's arrival was a great tonic to her. He was the head of the Russell family, and a baronet whose life had been unexpectedly, and, as Mary thought, inappropriately prolonged.

She never wearied of relating to her acquaintances how near Walter had been to succeeding to the title, and how much surprise was caused in everybody by the reappearance of an intervening heir who had been looked upon as dead. She had cherished the grievance so long as to have lost all shame in producing it. In fact she was quite unconscious of any. The recollection of its first occurrence took her back to the days of her youth when she was a beauty, and everybody, as she said, admired and loved her. Her animation on this theme was unfailing, and brought into piquant relief her conviction that Walter's luck in winning her had been something quite out of the common. It was plain that all her subsequent misfortunes were ascribed by her to the romantic folly which had allowed her to throw herself away. People said now that she "bore up wonderfully," and many admired her still more on finding that her husband had just escaped being a baronet. This discovery caused her to be made so much of, so praised and condoled with, that Mary, as she constantly remarked, felt as if the palmy days in Marleyford had come back again. In a very short time she was so thoroughly consoled that it needed something which upset her temper (a not infrequent event) to recall her to a poignant sense of her bereavement.

All this was more than Winifred in her present mood could patiently bear; and at last, one day, if only to give a new direction to her thoughts, she set out on her quest for Martha. That she had left her old lodgings she knew already, and the best chance of finding out her new address lay with the police. In Paris all people who do not take a false name can be hunted up in that manner. But Winifred's road to the Prefecture carried her through the quarter and past the very house where she herself had once lived. How many familiar memories, sad and humorous, tender and pleasant, crowded on her mind as she threaded the streets, and paused at last in front of the well-known portal! Here were changes which struck her at a glance. The concierge, for one, was not the same. Nevertheless, on enquiry she learnt that the greater number of the former tenants had returned after the siege. Some had never gone away; and among these was Claire, the little fleuriste. A great desire to see that kindly soul seized Winifred, and she ran up stairs. Reaching the cinquième at last, she knocked at the remembered door, and went in. Claire, at work upon a convolvulus spray, turned her head over her shoulders to inspect the visitor: then gave a cry of delighted surprise and sprang to her feet.

"Tiens! c'est mademoiselle! what joy! what a pleasure! Grandpère" (screaming into the ear of the blind and now deaf old man slumbering unconsciously by the window), "grandpère, it is our bonne demoiselle du premier come back to us. But not to stay? Alas! no, not to stay, of course. Those happy days were over. How many pleasant things belonged to the past now! But would not mademoiselle sit down? Grandpère would resume his seat also, for he was growing very old, and had suffered much in these latter months. Who had not suffered, however? Mademoiselle had thought of all her old friends? Was there ever such a pleasure as to see her again?"

Claire's delight was genuine, and touched grateful Winifred profoundly. It is enchanting to be welcomed with such warmth even by a humble flower-maker on a fifth floor back! Besides which, Claire was a dear little thing altogether, so neat and deft, quick-witted and kind-hearted: the best type of the hard-working Parisienne. She began pouring out all the news of the quarter, mixed with many sorrowful exclamations at the events of the past months, the horrors and sufferings of the protracted siege. The poor young medical student was dead: shot down in the trenches: the only son of the watchmaker opposite was crippled for life—and so on. That reminded Claire (in whom one person and thing always recalled another person and thing) that the other day she had met the poor little lady who did copies in the Louvre, and to whom Winifred, she knew, had always been kind ——

"But where is she now?" interrupted Winifred eagerly, cutting short the torrent of remarks.

"On the Boulevart Montmartre, mademoiselle. She was creeping along painfully, looking the ghost of her shadowy self. She said she had been very ill."

"Do you know her address?" asked Winifred.

Claire did know it; but it was a street Winifred had never heard of, and would not be able easily to find. Consequently the flower-maker offered to accompany her, and she prepared to start at once. The object of her expedition was shouted into grandpère's best ear, and it was to be presumed that a portion of the information reached him. For he shuffled laboriously to his feet to "saluer" Winifred, and promised to sit quite quiet and abstain from burning holes in his coat with the ashes of his pipe until his granddaughter came back again.

The two girls then started off, the fleuriste chattering like a magpie. She had a brother some years younger than herself, who was the light of her eyes. He had been a drummer in the National Guard during the siege, and she had much, very much, to recount of his escapes and his coolness. Winifred listened sympathetically, just because genuine feeling always interested her, and not because she guessed (as how should she?) that she was to hear of the drummer-boy again.

They reached the Rue de l'Ecureuil Noir, and here Claire took her leave, after pointing out a tall narrow house, and informing her companion that Martha Freake lived at the very top of it. Enquiries of the concierge elicited that the "Anglaise" was at home; she did not often go out now, the man added, for indeed she could hardly drag one foot after another. Winifred mounted the endless stairs and, for all her youth and strength, was breathless when she reached the last. It was a shabby, almost squalid house, and the people she saw about looked haggard and careworn.

On knocking at the door to which she had been directed, no answer reached her ear. A second attempt being equally fruitless, she gently turned the handle and entered.

The room was neat; but small, bare and poverty-stricken. In an old arm-chair by the window sat Martha, so wan, so aged and wasted, that Winifred at the first glance doubted if it were she. Probably she had replied to the knock, for she was leaning forward with her eyes fixed on the door, but her voice at a little distance was no longer audible. At the apparition of Winifred a great delight swept over her face, and an inarticulate exclamation of exceeding joy broke from her lips. The girl hurried forward with outstretched arms, and Martha, mute and trembling, fell into her protecting embrace. She was so weak that any sudden emotion made her shake from head to foot, and it was some time before Winifred's caressing touch and voice could restore her to composure.

Nevertheless, there was a change in her, which her young visitor with the insight of sympathy was quick to note. Physically she was worn and consumed to such a degree that to look at her was to

wonder how she yet lived. But mentally she was marvellously improved. The cloud that had formerly obscured her intelligence in her quiet moments seemed to have lifted, and the restlessness which generally alternated with it was gone. Later, Winifred learnt that during the siege, as long as her health lasted, she had been untiring in her ministrations to her poor and suffering neighbours; and it seemed as if the contact with grim misery, and the echo in her mind of terribly real events, had overborne and stilled her own anguish of soul.

Presently they began to talk: and, reticent as Martha showed herself, she could not entirely prevent Winifred from guessing the truth.

"Surely—forgive my saying it!—you needn't live here," exclaimed the latter, with a discontented glance round the sparingly-furnished room.

"I have not earned anything for months," was the answer, given, however, with some hesitation.

Winifred, aware that the "earnings," had always been pathetically small, was not much enlightened; but she could not press the point. After many weeks she came to know, indirectly, that Martha had parted with a portion of her microscopic income to relieve a need which she believed to be greater than her own. For herself, she could afford to take no heed for the future, she thought, as the space of time in front of her must be brief. Something of this she conveyed, in replying to an observation of Winifred's regarding the absence of a stove.

"This is spring," said Martha.

"But spring does not last," returned her companion, impatiently; "nor summer either."

"The mild weather will last as long as I shall."

Winifred put her arm round the wasted frame. "Do you know why I have come back to Paris? To take you to live with me."

The colour rose faintly into Martha's pallid cheeks. "What claim have I on you, child?" she asked tenderly, gratefully, yet a little proudly too.

"The claim that—those by whose wealth I have benefited worked you a wrong which they are too blind or too indifferent to expiate." And Winifred related all she knew.

Martha listened startled; at first almost a little scared. The cruel story which had dwelt dumbly and darkly in her memory so long, when put into words again awoke something of its past terror and vividness of anguish. But little by little, Winifred's earnest and generous pity first quieted, then touched her. After years of lonely pain, her heart unclosed itself once more to the voice of human sympathy. She wept; she whose grief for long had known only the torture of dry-eyed sobs; and the rain of sorrow fell with bountiful refreshment on her seared and blighted heart.

Winifred petted her as she might have done a child, only more

tenderly, for with her compassion mingled something of awe. She felt that in this newly-stirred spirit there were depths of suffering that she could never sound. It was characteristic of Martha that she asked few questions. In her simple-minded nature, vindictiveness held no place, and she was above the paltry satisfaction that details might have afforded her. They talked of their plans, for she made no further objection to living with Winifred. Only she was the first to suggest that Mary might be an obstacle.

"No," said Winifred decidedly, shaking her head. "She will not want me, I am sure. She has already said she will go back to Provence to her friends there, unless the Russells invite her—an event on which I know that she counts. I shall tell her that in future my home is to be yours."

"You can add that it will not be for long," Martha added quietly; so quietly that Winifred glanced at her, for a moment uncertain what she meant. But the serene and sad "far away" look in her eyes was explanation enough: Martha meant that she was dying. Winifred took one of the transparent hands and kissed it softly for all reply; then, promising to return ere many days were over, she went away.

The following week, the date of the funeral being at last fixed, Sir Charles Russell arrived. He was followed by Mark and Dorothy. The news of the delay in the final rites—a concession obtained from the authorities with extreme difficulty; for in France, according to law, burial must take place within forty-eight hours after death—had deferred their projected departure from The Limes, and Dolly had been consuming her innermost heart with impatience.

"It was dreadful," she confided to Winifred. "Miss Dallas, now that she is to be Lady Hatherley, is simply insupportable. And my uncle alternates between sulks and fidgets. Mark has behaved like an angel, although rather a low-spirited one. Mamma is in a dumb fury, and Flossy is just one overflowing urn of tears. Uncle John made no objection to my leaving him or to earning my own livelihood. In fact he praised my spirit. It is the first time he has ever praised anything in me, and Flossie was quite hurt at it. But I told her that if she would invest in a broom and sweep the Elmsleigh crossings, he would probably discover that she had always been his favourite niece. I can assure you, Winifred, he grows more of a miser every day. Yet he heaps presents upon his bride-elect: and intends to have a magnificent wedding."

"Dolly speaks very confidently of earning her own livelihood; but I do not quite see how it is to be done," said Winifred to Mark, a few hours later. They had met with a good deal of constraint; and were now talking perseveringly on subjects quite unconnected with each other.

"I cannot consider that our responsibilities towards her cease because she chooses to live away from us," observed Mark. "My

father, for some reason which I do not attempt to fathom, seems inclined to let her work out the experiment. But I have told her that she is to apply to me in her first difficulty, and I trust to you to see that she does so."

"I daresay she will succeed much better than you think."

"You have yourself, Winifred, just hinted that you consider her success doubtful."

Winifred bit her lip. She had indeed, within two minutes, said two things that sounded completely contradictory. How explain that her latest remark had been wrung from her by secret irritation at the measured speech and judicial air of Mark?

"I think what I meant was that the methods of success do not seem very clear, but that, all the same, Dolly's own courage is a very hopeful factor."

"I think what you meant was that rebellion for its own sake is a good thing to cultivate," retorted he.

"But surely you cannot deny that Dolly is right in wishing to be independent?"

Mark made no answer. He was out of humour with independence in women; although, possibly, if *one* woman had submitted to him, he would have applauded an enterprising disposition in the rest of the sex. There was a silence so long that it became embarrassing, and, at last, Mark himself was the first to break it.

"May I ask what are your own plans?"

"They are quite unaltered since I left Elmsleigh," answered Winifred quietly.

"Nevertheless, I have as yet seen no trace of the lady whom it pleases you to consider my father's victim."

"She is coming to live with me: as soon as my aunt has decided upon her own movements."

Mark rose and took a turn about the room. He looked very stern, and muttered something in which the word "folly" was alone audible. Winifred went to him; and, impulsively, without thinking what she did, laid her hand upon his arm.

"Why do you judge me harshly only because I try to do my duty?" she said gently.

He looked at her with eyes of reluctant passion, crushing her hand, at the same time, within his grasp until he hurt her.

"Duty? It is Quixotism."

"No. I am so far a member of your family, that I have profited by your father's bounty. And the chance that has led me to discover the injustice, of which, as I believe, Martha Freake was and is the victim, seems to me a kind of injunction to take upon myself the expiation which all of you reject."

"Nonsense, Winifred! If you were rich ——"

"I am rich enough for that—and for her. Poor thing! She needs so little. If you could see her, I think you would be sorry for her."

"I am willing enough to help her," said Mark quickly. "Whatever she may have been in the past, I should say, from all I have heard, that now she is a fit object for charity."

"But not for pity?" Winifred raised her eyes with a quiet smile.

He looked more and more annoyed. "For pity, if you will, always supposing that you mean by that a mere instinct of humanity. But certainly not for pity in your sense of exaggerated devotion and reckless severance of yourself from all old and natural ties."

Winifred sighed. It was very hard to know that Mark condemned her, and yet after her last interview with Martha, how was it possible that she should draw back? Her eyes filled with sudden tears as she recalled the wasted figure, the shabby room, the uncomplaining poverty and gentle endurance—all, in fact, that made up her latest recollection of Sir John's injured cousin. "You do not understand," she said, trying hard to steady her voice, and to suppress all signs of emotion. "You seem to think that I have taken up her cause out of mere perversity, and that I am squandering my compassion ——"

"You have expressed my innermost idea—you are 'squandering your compassion.'" Mark was nettled at a faint smile which curled Winifred's lips, and of which he could not read the meaning. So he went on hotly—"I do not wish her to die of want, or to be in need of anything. If she be poor and ill ——"

"She is very, very poor; and more than ill; she is dying."

"Then in heaven's name let everything possible be done for her. Send her money, food, medicines—a doctor ——

"And do you suppose she would accept all this broke in Winifred, with kindling eyes of such honest indignation that Mark looked at her in surprise. But he was determined to stick to his own point of view. It was that Martha might be a lunatic rather than a criminal, but could never have been a victim.

"If people cannot help themselves, they must consent to be helped," he resumed.

"I understand," answered Winifred, bitterly. "You would give her everything except two things, which she most needs and has least received—belief, and the pity that springs not from duty, but from love. Yes! Feed her, clothe her, tend her while her poor, joyless, wasted life still clings to her suffering body. Do all this for her, and hug yourself with a proud consciousness of having performed your duty. But deny her that for which she has thirsted and hungered through tragic days and sleepless nights—the tender compassion which would prove to her that she is not a pariah and an outcast. Keep her alive in the flesh, and let her die morally inch by inch. And when you have prolonged her days—with the help of your money, which is much, and your charity, which is boundless, let her close her eyes on the world with the knowledge that you have never once ceased to suspect, to despise, and condemn her."

"Winifred!"

The girl had poured out her protest in such a fiery heat of generous wrath; her low vibrating tones had lent such power, and the force of impassioned conviction in her such dignity, to her words, that Mark was simply electrified. Anger, doubt, wounded family-pride and mortified self-love were all swallowed up in sheer amazement. After his one exclamation, he could simply stand and gaze at her. For a moment or two she looked back at him, still thrilling from head to foot with agitation, and too lifted out of herself for personal consciousness. But, little by little, his glance overpowered her; she underwent a swift reaction of regret, not for what she had expressed, but for having expressed it to *him;* love made her fear that she might have offended him; and—too proud to ask for pardon, too true to retract, she turned a little away from him, and buried her face in her hands.

The movement, so humble and graceful, touched Mark profoundly. From his proud Winifred, it almost amounted to an act of surrender. At least, he thought so, and like a true man, thought also that the moment had come to bend her to his will.

He went up to her, and, before she guessed his intention, put his arm round her waist. She started and tried to free herself: then stood perfectly still.

"Winifred—for my sake, give up this folly and come back to England—back to me."

His voice was low and full of pleading; but she made no answer. Only shook her head. He took her two hands in one of his, and drew them down from her face, plunging his glance into hers. "Winifred!" He was determined to conquer her, and resolute himself not to yield an inch.

"Why do you ask it?" she cried, and broke away from him. "It is cruel, useless. The poor thing is dying. Everything I can do for her will only last a few months: perhaps weeks."

Mark frowned. He did not like being crossed, and Winifred was crossing him. He wanted to hear her say that she would give up everything for him—for *him:* and here was she holding out for the gratification of a mere whim.

"You count it as nothing, then, the injurious doubts which your conduct, by implication, throws on my family?" This was decidedly a weak argument for a lover, and a personal one would have done better; but Mark was a little angry, and his pride was desperately afraid of a fresh rebuff.

"I cannot help my convictions," replied Winifred, humbly, casting at him an imploring glance that said "Forgive me" as plainly as a look could speak. And as his brow still remained very dark, she ventured to approach him again, and added very sweetly: "Lend me to Martha for a little while, Mark. She will not trouble either of us long."

He looked down, in reality more exasperated than moved to compliance, yet so far vanquished that he could find no persuasive reply.

She made him feel churlish—even a little childish, and he did not like that.

"As you please," he said at last, reluctantly. "But the burden you have taken on yourself is too great for you alone. Will you let me help you with it?"

"No," returned Winifred, decidedly, and shook her golden head.

Mark flushed. "Not even so much will you concede?"

"Listen!" said the girl: and while her lips quivered a little with emotion, she laid her hands frankly in his. "For the next few months let us be nothing to one another—nothing (with a charming blush) but friends. You shall go your way, and let me go mine. I will carry my self-appointed burden alone, and expiate, unaided, my own mistakes—if I have made them. When all is over, and my task is done, perhaps you may have arrived at a better frame of mind regarding it. If not—we will never speak of it, and the experience of this part of my life will belong to me alone."

"Of course, if you need me so little, I have nothing more to say," answered Mark; and quite abruptly, standing away from her, he began to talk of indifferent things.

Winifred was extremely surprised; sooth to say, secretly mortified and disappointed. The ways of men being quite unknown to her guilelessness, she jumped to the conclusion that she had offended Mark, and felt desperately and humiliatingly inclined to beg his pardon. On the other hand, she was shy about it; was sure he would not expect it; and, her spirits sinking to zero, she began to persuade herself that he really did not care for her. And Mark, who had anticipated, from her usual straightforwardness, that she would have met his sulky speech with an eager protest, was equally disappointed on his side, and hugely affronted to boot.

The "little rift within the lute" widened during the next few days, and they parted at last with a coldness that left an aching in the heart of both. Winifred consoled herself as well as she could by overwhelming Martha with kindness, and Mark by indignantly hugging his belief in his father.

Meanwhile, Mary, quietly informed by Winifred of her discovery respecting Miss Freake, and of her consequent intentions, had flown into a violent rage. It was not that she really loved Winifred, or that she could not be as comfortable and happy away from her as with her; but she was one of those people who, the instant they are deprived of a thing begin placing an exaggerated value upon it.

She accused Winifred of ingratitude; drowned herself in angry tears; and asked the four winds of heaven who was to pack for her, write her notes, run her errands, keep her accounts, and govern her servants?

Mary Russell was strangely and shamefully unaffected by Winifred's discovery of her past baseness towards Martha; she became furious on being told that her victim was poor, suffering, and had not many

months to live; while at the same time, almost in the same breath, she talked of going to see Martha and "having it out about John." She heaped, indeed, plenty of abuse on her brother; but was speechless with indignation at Winifred's view that she could no longer continue to profit by his bounty. Her friends in Provence, being French, were naturally disinclined to approve of Winifred's conduct; and invited the, as they supposed, lonely and disconsolate widow to return to Provence and spend some more time with them; and Mary was not slow to perceive that, under such circumstances, separation from Winifred might have its advantages.

So she finally took her departure; and Winifred, giving up the apartment, moved into a small and pretty little one au quatrième which she had selected for herself. Thither she in a few days transported Martha. There she installed her studio, and settled down to work. Dolly, of course, had joined her, and was as eager as herself to begin earning money. Winifred hunted up as many members as she could find of her former artistic connection; sold two small pictures at low prices to a dealer, and managed to get Dolly one or two orders for painting plates and fans. But these brought in such small earnings, and Dolly's round face was wont to lengthen so piteously whenever she talked over her prospects, that Winifred finally suggested her teaching English. She seized upon the idea with avidity, having a mortal fear of failing in her enterprise and of being forced to return to Elmsleigh. In Paris, at any rate, she was free, she was near Richard, and she amused herself. Winifred was exquisitely kind to her in a half elder-sisterly, wholly charming way that made an agreeable contrast to the family jars that diversified relations with Mrs. Hatherley and Florence.

So everybody was pressed into the service of Dorothy's career.

Richard was set to work to beat up recruits, Winifred talked about her perpetually to her fellow artists; Dolly herself, with a firm conviction of merit that went a very long way, left nobody any peace on the subject of her wishes; and the result of all this was that the pupils shortly presented themselves. They were not very numerous and did not pay very well at first; everything in Paris being at so low an ebb. But they were "a foundation," as Dolly said of them collectively. She set to work upon them with the greatest energy, and having a bright manner, a fluent tongue, a fund of quiet assurance, and the prettiest face possible, she had the luck to become popular. Moreover, she was une créole: magic words: what of romance, and charm and sleepy grace do they not suggest to the Parisian? Nothing for Dolly's present purposes could have turned out better than the fact of her having been born in Jamaica. She was overwhelmed with attentions; Winifred got some orders through her; Martha revived a little; and everything in the tiny household went merrily as a marriage-bell.

(To be continued.)

IN THAT ROOM.

"I SHALL have to put you in that room, after all, Jenny. I had intended the east chamber for you, and it was made up yesterday; but last night Mrs. Deane came unexpectedly with her baby, and we had to give it to her, as it was the only one ready. I did not like to put her out of it this morning, and into the Red Room."

"No, of course not. I'm sure I would as soon be in one room as another."

"Mary Ann shall sleep on the sofa in the room, so you won't mind; you'll not feel lonely, dear."

"In wonder's sake, Martha, what do you think I want with Mary Ann in my room?"

Mrs. Carrick paused: "I thought you might get nervous at the prospect of sleeping in it alone. It is away from the rest of the house, so to say; up these other stairs."

"Nervous!" exclaimed Jenny; "why, I should never think of such a thing. What is there to get nervous about? You have not a burglar epidemic abroad just now, have you?—or a ghost that walks the room?"

"N—o, not exactly. Burglars! oh dear no. I've not heard of any in this neighbourhood."

At this reply, Miss Malcolm turned suddenly from the contemplation of her pretty new grey travelling suit in the large cheval glass—for they had now reached the Red Room, and confronted her cousin with an enquiring look.

"Martha Carrick, it *is* a ghost. And you meant to smuggle me into his den without proper warning or introduction!"

"You ridiculous girl! There's no ghost about it. Only a story connected with the room."

"What story is it?"

"You—you ——" Mrs. Carrick flushed as she recognised her mistake, and came to a standstill. "Jenny, I thought you knew all about it; I did, indeed."

"Only a story, after all! What a disappointment! A real, veritable ghost would have been a new experience in these enlightened days; delightfully sensational. As to any story connected with your Red Room, I have never heard of it."

"You have heard of our Red Room, Jenny?"

"I've heard of your Red Room, and believe you and Frank think so much of it that you always spell it with a capital letter. It is a very nice room, Martha," added the young lady, turning herself about in it.

This room was situated in the north-west corner of Frank Carrick's old-fashioned house; a very, very old red-brick house, in an old suburb of the capital. The room filled up a gable-end, and was not near any other room, being approached by a separate staircase, and then by a long passage. Seen in the afternoon sunshine, it looked, though of good size, the cosiest chamber in the world, with its red carpet and curtains, its grand old furniture, and the pretty look-out upon the bright garden underneath, and to the green hills of Middlesex in the distance.

"It is a perfectly charming room!" exclaimed the young visitor. "And now, Martha, what's the story?"

"Oh, my dear, never mind the story; I don't think it's one you would be interested in. And you must make haste down, for I'm sure tea is in, and Mrs. Deane was wishing for it."

She ran away as she spoke; she was not much more than a girl herself. And Miss Malcolm, charmed with the change from her own little country home in the monotonous seaside village called Nalem, put herself to rights, and forgot all about "the story."

But when night came, and Mrs. Carrick again accompanied her young guest through the worm-eaten staircase and narrow passages to the same isolated spot, the room seemed to have lost its cheerful aspect. By the light of the two wax candles standing on the dressing-table, the red carpet and draperies took a sombre depth and shade that was by no means enlivening; at least, such was the opinion of the hostess herself. Jenny was chattering away as usual, and seemed to be entirely unobservant of the change which night had wrought in her surroundings.

"It does look lonely here at night," at last broke out Mrs. Carrick. "I do think, Jenny, you should let Mary Ann sleep on that sofa in the recess."

Jane Malcolm gazed with real and not affected astonishment at her cousin. "Martha, what can be the matter with you? Have you grown nervous since you married?—perhaps living in this old-world dwelling, that I suppose must be a relic of the Ancient Britons, has made you so?"

"No, no, Jenny; I only thought you might be nervous."

"*I* nervous!" echoed Jenny. "Feel that arm, cousin mine," and, with a gay smile, she threw back the open sleeve and held out the round white arm, its smooth firmness betraying the best of health. "Aunt Deborah is fond of telling me I am so sound and well, Martha, as to smack of plebeianism: if I *have* any nerves, which I doubt, they are out of sight and out of mind."

"I am glad to hear it, my dear. Mary Ann ——"

"*Glad to hear it!* Why, what else did you expect to hear? You must be out of order yourself, Patty. And now let us say good night, and you go to your own bed and to sleep, and don't worry me any more about Mary Ann."

Mrs. Carrick, thus adjured, takes a final survey of the room, sees that the window is safely bolted, and bids her guest good night. Her husband was already in his room.

"Hope you've been long enough, Patty!"

"Well, I did stay a little while; the room seemed so lonely. As I stood in it, Frank, I felt glad that I had not told her the ghost story."

"I should think you'd never be foolish enough to repeat to her such rubbish as that," reproved Mr. Frank Carrick.

"It would not disturb Jane if I did; be sure of that, Frank. I never saw such a happy girl. You deem it strange *I* should think so much of these odd stories; whereas I feel it is strange she should care so little for them. I would wager that beautiful diamond ring you've just given me that if a ghost appeared to her she would only laugh at it."

"Sensible girl!" said Mr. Carrick. "I say, Patty, she's uncommonly pretty. Such a particularly nice face."

Jane, meanwhile, was preparing for rest. The last thing, when her prayers were said, committing herself to the good care of God, for the girl was honestly devout, and the candles were put out, she drew the window-curtains open, and looked out. It was a beautiful moonlit night. The wide, solitary landscape lay bathed in light. Not a sound was to be heard, not a movement to be seen, telling of life's busy action. This old house of Mr. Carrick's, called The Gables, was in a lonely part of the old western suburb, no other dwellings were very near it. A dark wall, overgrown with ivy, and high enough to keep out a besieging army, encased its grounds all round. On the brightest of days the place had somehow a solitary look; which, perhaps, was the reason that it got the reputation of being haunted.

"A peaceful scene," thought Jane, "and really quieter than Nalem: there we do see the men straggling home from the public-house, and the fishing-boats putting out to sea. What a goose Patty must be getting to suppose I should not like to sleep alone!"

At the breakfast table the next morning Miss Malcolm appeared with the brightest of faces. She had slept soundly.

"Well, Martha," she said laughingly, when salutations had passed, "your ghost was not polite enough to pay me a visit; but I had the queerest dream."

"I hope it was a pleasant one," said Martha. "You know what omen is drawn from the first dream under a strange roof."

"That it will come true," laughed Jane again. "Well, I don't think my dream is likely to come true."

"You've no objection to telling it, have you?" asked Mr. Carrick, echoing her laugh.

"Oh, not in the least," said the girl. "I went to sleep almost as soon as my head touched the pillow, and it was in this first sleep that I met your ancestor, Colonel Carrick. You know we had been speaking of him during the evening, Martha, and I had admired his portrait, and told you that if I was to be visited by any ghost I should

prefer the handsome royalist. Well, I dreamed that I was at a great party in this very house, only the furniture was all of it quite old-fashioned, and instead of your big windows, there were ever so many smaller ones, and so high from the floor they looked like prison windows to me ——"

"Why, I declare, that was the very appearance the house presented before you altered it, Mr. Carrick!" interrupted Mrs. Deane. "I dare say Miss Malcolm has heard it described, or perhaps saw it before the alterations."

"Neither the one nor the other," replied Jenny. "I did not know the house *had* been altered."

"A few of the rooms have been modernised a little," said Mrs. Deane, who was an old friend of the Carrick family. "I wonder you should dream of them as they used to be!"

"Well, I did," said Jenny.

"I see, I see; you are bound to put it all to the Red Room account," Mr. Carrick cried, gaily. "You and my wife were gossiping over it, you know."

Jenny looked at him with a rather puzzled face, but Mrs. Carrick interposed quickly. "Come, do go on with your dream, Jenny. There's nothing I like so much to hear about as people's dreams."

And Jenny went on. "When I came into the room where all this gala company was, the first person I saw distinctly was a tall, handsome man, in a grand uniform just like that in the picture of Colonel Carrick, and the face of this gentleman was precisely like the face in the portrait. He came forward to meet me as I entered, and as he stood before me a moment, what *do* you think he said?" And here, pausing, Jenny laughs and blushes a little.

"We give it up; none of this family are good at conundrums, Miss Jane," Frank Carrick remarks; and so with another little laugh, she goes on.

"He said, in so low a tone that I understood at once nobody but myself was expected to hear it: 'Miss Malcolm, my nephew has arrived, and is impatient to meet his promised wife.' The next moment he turned about, and a young man, not at all like the Colonel, and dressed in the fashion of to-day, stood before me. He put out his hand to take mine, and as he did so I started back in a sort of fright, whereupon the old Colonel bent down and whispered in my ear, 'It is of no use for you to resist, my dear; it is your fate.'"

Here Jenny pauses. Nobody interrupts her.

"This," she continues, "only frightened me the more, and I turned and ran out of the room. The Colonel ran after me, not at all angrily, but laughing immoderately. But I was too swift for him. I ran upstairs straight to the Red Room (my room, you know, that I am now actually sleeping in), and banged the door in his face. Then I awoke, and I was really laughing myself."

"That's not much of a dream," said Mrs. Deane disparagingly.

"But it's not all," said Jane. "After lying awake a few minutes I fell fast asleep again, and I took up my dream just where it had left off, for I heard the sound of the Colonel's laughter and footsteps growing fainter and fainter as he went down stairs. I had escaped the Colonel, but there before me stood an old, old lady with a white satin dress over her arm. 'It's of no use for you to resist,' she said, repeating the Colonel's words and wagging her head wickedly at me, 'it's your fate; for this prank of yours you will be married to-night, young lady.' Do what I would, I couldn't escape from her; and she put on me the white satin dress. It seemed to be upon me very quickly, and then as she opened the door and seized my wrist to lead me down, I sprang away; but my foot caught in my grand gown, and I felt myself falling in that frightful way one does fall in dreams. And here, while I was falling, I again awoke."

"And was that the ending?" cried Martha.

"No. I lay awake a goodish while this time, speculating about my odd dream, and especially the odd manner in which the same dream had returned to me. And during this speculation I fell asleep a third time, and *again the same thread* was resumed. This time I was lying in a great canopied bed in that very Red Room, and the old lady and the Colonel were standing before me looking as solemn as judges. The old lady came close up to the bed, and leaning over me, said, in a shrill little voice: 'You won't escape us again, miss, I can tell you; never again. That ancestress of yours served this family a nice trick in her day, and got us well scandalised by her folly.' Then that handsome Colonel laughed, and said to me, in the politest way: 'And you, my dear, are going to atone for all that. You'll unite'—and snap here went the thread of the dream again, and I awoke. I suppose it was that horrid little black-and-tan terrier of yours, Martha, yapping under my window, that disturbed me this time. I went to sleep again, but I didn't dream again; which was a disappointment, you'll allow. I did so want to hear what the Colonel was going to say," she added laughingly.

"The fact of it is, you were disappointed at not meeting that nephew again, Miss Jenny," said Frank, jocosely.

"Of course I was," retorted Jenny in the same strain. "But was it not a very odd dream—taking in the fact of my resuming it twice after waking?"

"Well, yes, it was rather odd," he admitted. "But the fact of resuming a dream is not very uncommon."

"No, I don't know that it is," returned Jenny, feeling somehow by Mr. Carrick's words and manner as if she had been telling a very foolish and uninteresting story. Martha, too, looked dull and distrait, and that little Mrs. Deane had a queer, constrained expression as if she were laughing at her. Abashed by these indications, Jenny withdrew into herself, and became silent. And the days went on, and nothing more was said.

It was the time of the May meetings, of the picture galleries, of gay parties, of lectures, of theatres, and of other busy things, sacred and profane; so it seemed to Jane Malcolm that she had not a minute in the day to call her own. The sun was hot, the streets were thronged; and Jane, either on foot or in the Carricks' modest little carriage, made her way amid stifling heat and dust to one place and another. The theological May controversies and the social science lectures greatly won her favour, and especially the musical réunions that, to ordinary ears, had in them not one bit of melody.

"How you *can* stand so much dulness, Jenny; the theology and the philosophy and the scrapings; puzzles me," exclaimed Mrs. Frank Carrick one morning when Jenny came down equipped for another expedition. "How you can listen to it all, I can't imagine; let alone comprehend it."

"Comprehend it! Why, bless me, Martha, I don't pretend to comprehend the half of it."

"What on earth do you go for, then?"

"Oh, to see the people, and for the sake of going out somewhere, and I do like the hard, dry things a little. Now I am up from the country it is right to make the most of my time."

"Good gracious!" cried Mrs. Martha, "when I thought and Frank thought that you were up to all the isms and the ologies! The idea of your going for nothing but to meet people, like any other girl!"

"Did you imagine I was not like any other girl, Martha?"

"Why, yes, in a way, I suppose I did. You know, Jenny, you were always above me. Compare your grand intellect with poor mine!"

Jenny laughed heartily. "Compare it with yours! My superior intellect! How is it shown, Martha?—in not being afraid of ghosts? By the way, you have never told me your ghost story yet. *What* is it?"

Martha looks queer. "Oh, it's nothing but an old fancy about the old Colonel and some friend of his appearing now and then."

"In the Red Room, I suppose," laughs Jenny, merrily. "And who's the friend?—the old lady I met in my dream?"

"What if it is? You have not met either of them since the first night, Jane."

"No, that I've not. But, Martha, I met the young man again last night, the nephew they were so anxious for me to marry."

"Now what do you mean by saying that?" demanded Mrs. Carrick.

"Well, I dreamt of him. It's the second time I've seen him, you know, and I assure you I am getting quite reconciled to the match."

She went off in a burst of merriment, for the little brougham was waiting, and Mrs. Deane was waiting also. They were going together alone, to an afternoon concert.

In the midst of the entertainment, which was hot and crowded,

a lady sitting just behind them was taken with faintness. Miss Malcolm turned round to offer her fan, when she saw a gentleman, standing at the side, suddenly turn his gaze upon her. Jenny's nerves were well sheathed, as she had said, but a very queer sensation thrilled her from head to foot. *The face of this stranger was the face she had twice seen in her dreams;* the face of the man whom the old Colonel had called his nephew!

The fainting lady had to be taken out; and in the bustle this occasioned, the stranger moved forward, so that he was more than on a level with Jenny. She directed Mrs. Deane's attention to him.

"Do you know that gentleman?" she whispered.

"Which gentleman? *That* young man? Never saw him before, my dear. He is looking at you."

Taking a safe opportunity, Jenny presently looked at him. Yes, there were the same marked lineaments she so well remembered; the high, well-formed nose, the searching eyes and peculiarly drooping eyelids, the straight, dark brows, the clean-shaved, firm chin. On the upper lip was a slight, dark moustache. He was tall, and well-made; altogether a well and rather distinguished-looking man.

How the concert progressed after that, Jane Malcolm never knew. The fiddles scraped and the voices quavered, but she heard none of it. She was only conscious that ever and anon that stranger face was turned upon her with a gaze of curious intentness. When all was over, various acquaintances of Mrs. Deane's approached them, and Jenny had to laugh and talk; but she was fully conscious that her unknown, mysterious neighbour was hovering near to keep her in view. Only in the crowded progress to the door did she lose sight of him. The last glimpse she had of him, he was linking his arm with that of another gentleman, to whom he began to talk.

"Anyway, he must be flesh and blood, and not a phantom; there's satisfaction in that," quoth Jenny to herself. "It seems unaccountably odd, though."

They got home in time for afternoon tea. Mrs. Deane swallowed a cup standing, and then ran up stairs to her baby and nurse. And over their own tea, Jenny told her cousin the strange story of the afternoon.

Mrs. Martha, listening to it, looked as if all the ghosts of the Carricks' ancestral mansion had suddenly appeared before her. "Who would have thought, Jenny, that such a little, matter-of-fact, practical person as you would have been the heroine of so uncanny a mystery!"

Jenny laughed. "Martha, you treat this little sequel to my dream with more respect than you did the dream itself."

Martha coloured; glancing at Jenny in a quick, observant way.

"And I don't know that I wonder at it," went on Jenny. "Of course, this queer fact of meeting my dream-gentleman in broad daylight, makes the chief interest in the whole matter."

"Are you *sure* the young man you saw was the same that appeared to you in your dream?"

"Sure and certain, Martha. In my *two* dreams, please remember. His face made a clear impression upon my memory in the first dream; but it was nothing like the exactness with which every feature, and its every expression, fixed itself like a photograph in my mind in the dream of last night."

"I never heard anything like the affair altogether; never," ejaculated Mrs. Carrick, with emphasis.

"*I* have," quietly returned Jenny. "Nothing of the kind ever came under my own observation or experience before, but I've read and heard of such things. We are Scotch people, you know, on my mother's side, and I have heard Grandmamma Mackay tell a great many of those old, second-sight, Scotch stories, and especially about such dreams as mine. A great many of them, I believe, are purely imaginary, helped on by some old tradition; but now and then something like this experience of mine does happen, I take it."

"Your father was Scotch, too, Jenny."

"No, only in name. Originally I suppose he was."

"I wonder what Frank will say to *this!*" cried Mrs. Carrick, in a sort of triumph. "He is a wretched unbeliever in general."

"*I* shan't tell him. You can, if you please."

"Of course I shall;" and that very night she kept her word.

Frank laughed, as was his wont. And what he said was not at all complimentary to his wife or to Jenny. In fact, he doubted the whole story; believed that Jenny had become so impressed with that dream-gentleman that she endowed the first fine-looking fellow she saw with his lineaments; and mocked at Martha for a goose.

"That shows how much you know of Jane Malcolm," retorted she. "She's about as fanciful as you are, Frank, and no more so."

"I don't think Jenny is very fanciful myself, Martha; but girls will be girls," declared Mr. Carrick, with the air of summing the matter up.

"And stupid men *will* be stupid men," retorted Mrs. Carrick, making a grimace at her lord and master.

This ended it for the present. But, what with one thing and another, Mrs. Martha felt intensely aggravated.

The May meetings were over; and in three days more Jane's visit would come to an end. A festive evening gathering was about to be held at The Gables: Frank and his wife had been too busy to think of it before.

On the night of the festivities, Martha, herself dressed, went to the Red Room to see for her cousin. Jenny was standing before the glass, settling some pink rose-buds in the body of her dress. It was of white tarletan, the skirt looped up with roses and rose-buds.

"Oh, Jenny," she exclaimed impulsively, "you look lovely!"

"I may *look* lovely; but I don't feel so just now," returned the girl, a curious seriousness running through her light tone.

"And why not, pray?—Stay, this wants a pin here."

"Martha, you will think me cracked, I dare say; but, as true as I'm standing here, I am wearing the exact dress—this white robe and these pink roses—that I wore when I found myself standing before the old Colonel in my dream. I remembered it as you came into the room; it flashed upon me with a sort of shock."

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Martha, dropping a whole paper of pins in her trepidation.

"You know I told you at the time that the nephew's dress was of the fashion of to-day, but I never remembered my own dress until this moment. This is what you call *a latent memory*, I suppose;" and Jenny laughed a little. "It is the identical dress the old lady took off to attire me in the satin."

"Oh, my goodness!" again breathed Mrs. Martha, as she picked up her pins, "what a dreadful thing, Jenny! I believe it all comes of this room; and—but there's the bell and the first carriage, and I must run."

She whisked out of the room as if she were fleeing from a small army of ghosts. Jenny looked after her in surprise, for she saw that her terror was real. And, for a moment, as she stood there alone, and heard the wind sweeping through the long passages, and shaking the old door-latches, an undefined feeling came over her, not of fear, but of something unusual, either in the atmosphere about her, or in her own state of mind. "It *can't* be this Red Room, as Martha says," she murmured, "it must be that I am growing silly." But yet she was not sorry to see Mary Ann come back, asking whether there was anything else she could do.

Taking a last look at herself, she drew on her white gloves and went down to the drawing-rooms. And once in that gay, bright scene, seeing glimpses of her own pretty self in the long mirrors, and meeting an endless array of Carricks of one and two and three generations, and other brilliant people, she forgot all about the dreams and their troubling puzzles, and remembered only the very agreeable present, that she was looking her best, and that some flattering eyes, bent on her, were beaming with a consciousness of that fact. One of these gazers was brought up to her and introduced as Tom Carrick, and they were both in the full swing of that remarkable nonsense young people delight in, when some stir in the room close by, and their host's voice raised in surprise, caused them to look round.

"What *you*, Henry! What does this mean?"

"It means that I am back," answered a pleasant voice: and Jenny felt ready to faint, for the speaker was the young man she had three times seen—twice in her dreams, once at the concert. "In fact, I've been back a week or two, Frank, but most of that time has had to be spent in the country."

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Malcolm; it's only another Carrick," cried her companion, perceiving her strange look. "This one is Henry; he has been absent for two or three years."

Jane Malcolm was watching the new-comer, listening to Martha's cordial reception of him, and holding her breath in a sort of eager restraint, till she should be brought face to face with him, hardly knowing, as it seemed to her dazed mind, whether he was real or unreal.

"Where has he been?" she asked mechanically.

"Oh, all about the Continent. Stayed chiefly in Paris, I fancy. Miss Malcolm, what *is* it? You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"Perhaps I have," she answered, in the same tone. And shortly she knew that Frank was standing before her, introducing to her his relative (a distant one), Mr. Henry Carrick. Raising her eyes, almost reluctantly, she met the same intent gaze she had received a few days ago. He bent forward a little, and said, in the quietest way: "I believe I saw you at St. James's Hall?"

"Yes," she answered: and he sat down by her side, and they conversed together, the tones of each quietly confidential. Mr. Tom Carrick found himself quite de trop, and moved away.

"I say, Martha," said he, "Henry has cut me out entirely with your pretty cousin. Just look at them!"

Mrs. Martha looked disturbed. She had heard vague reports that Henry Carrick was a very agreeable man, who made himself fascinating to women without the slightest idea of marrying, and she did not choose Jenny to be trifled with. Taking a détour presently, she made a little effort at breaking up the prolonged tête-à-tête, but unsuccessfully. At this failure she beckoned to her husband.

"Break up that flirtation, Frank, and bring Jenny over to me. I want her to make acquaintance with the Dunham girls."

"Flirtation!" repeated Frank. "They are talking about the iron mines in some Russian town."

"I don't care what they are talking about; I tell you it's a flirtation, Frank, and I want you to break it up. I don't approve of any such monopolising on the part of Mr. Harry Carrick."

Frank shrugged his shoulders. He saw how it was: though like a sensible host—would that hostesses possessed the same shining virtue—he hated to break up a tête-à-tête. "Why can't women let each other alone?" was his inward query, but being a rather new husband he felt bound to please his wife at any cost, and so, though much against his will, went forward to do her bidding. It is very curious how a concealed motive will sometimes convey itself to the person or persons most concerned. There was certainly nothing strange in the fact that a pretty girl like Miss Malcolm should be wanted elsewhere, and Henry Carrick was sufficiently a man of society to know that he *had* rather monopolised the young lady; but, when Frank, following on his wife's previous effort, advanced with a plausible excuse for carrying off Jenny, Henry knew it was all a ruse. "So

I am warned off, am I," thought he, and smiled to himself. Jenny also saw through it—that she must not make much acquaintance with this last-known of the Carricks; and somehow she felt resentful.

That night, when the guests had departed, Martha came to the Red Room for a minute's talk. "Well, Jenny," she began, "and how did you like my favourite, Tom Carrick?"

"I liked him very well," said Jenny; "but I liked Mr. Henry Carrick better."

"Oh, yes; I dare say Harry Carrick can make himself very agreeable! He is a great flirt, Jenny; at least, people say so. Nobody thought he would ever marry; when suddenly last year he sent news home that he was engaged. Who she is, or what she is, we don't know: he seems to be a little eccentric: but mind, Jenny, he is an engaged man."

Jenny blushed a bright red at this information, chiefly from the vexation that always assails a person of quick perception when they discover that they are being indirectly warned, and "talked at." Never very prone to restrain that quick spirit of hers, she flashed out an answer.

"Thanks, Martha, for your good intention; but I don't need your caution; *yet*, at all events. I am not in love with Mr. Henry Carrick."

Martha turned the colour of the Red Room itself. "Now, Jenny, that is so like you."

"So like me to see straight through your transparencies," laughed Jenny, recovering her good humour. "But if you *wouldn't* beat round the bush with me, Martha!"

"Well, well, dear, I should not like you to be taken-in by a meaningless flirt," said Mrs. Carrick. "Good night, and pleasant dreams to you!"

She shut the door softly and went away thinking, quite unaware that Henry Carrick was the hero of Jenny's singular dreams—for that young lady had not told it. "She is going away to-morrow, and so much the better," thought that estimably-prudent matron.

But the next day, when Henry Carrick walked in to The Gables with that pleasant, easy manner of his, an hour or so before Jenny's departure, on some flimsy errand concerning a fan he had unwittingly taken away in his pocket, Mrs. Martha's fears and suspicions bristled up again. And in spite of her clever manœuvring (which both saw through), he accompanied them to the station to see Jenny off by the train.

"It is quite shameful, Frank!" whispered Mrs. Carrick. "He has got her on his arm—do you see—leaving you and me to ourselves."

"Oh, dreadful!" gravely assented Frank. "What a goose you are, Martha!"

But the train was soon off; Jenny, all in tears, in it; and Mrs. Carrick breathed freely again.

"When are you going to be married, Mr. Henry?" she took courage to enquire.

"Don't know at all," he answered.

"We heard you were engaged."

"Oh, did you?"

Which was all Mrs. Martha got out of him.

A month, or so, went on. July came in; and on one of its earlier days Martha Carrick heard the astounding news that Henry was staying at Nalem, and might be often seen with Miss Malcolm.

"Frank, I shall go down to Nalem by the first train to-morrow morning and do my duty!"

"Nonsense," returned Frank.

"Indeed, I shall. And bring Jenny to her senses. He is staying down there with that fast George Otley, who owns a yacht, I hear, and no end of other wicked elements of snare and delusion."

"If it wasn't for this queer engagement of his, it would be all right," remarked Mr. Carrick, when he had done laughing.

"What?" from Mrs. Martha, in accents of indignant amazement. "You can say *that*, knowing Henry Carrick to be an unprincipled flirt."

It was now Frank Carrick's turn to look amazed. "An unprincipled flirt! Henry Carrick! Where did you get that idea, I should like to know?"

"Where should I get it? From you, sir."

"Now, Martha, you are too heedless. I told you once that Henry was an odd fellow, and though very attractive to women, we didn't consider him a marrying man. I never said he was a flirt: he is nothing so contemptible. For a rich man and an idle one, he is wonderfully well-behaved in all ways. And dear little Jenny might be proud to gain his hand if it were in the market."

"But it is *not* in the market, sir. There's no beating sense into any of you men; that there isn't. To Nalem I go to-morrow."

And to Nalem she went by an early train, her husband dutifully escorting her. Things were far worse than even Mrs. Martha had anticipated. She found quite a charming little society at that dull place Nalem: boating clubs and sailings on the sea by moonlight, and picnics and such like (as she was pleased to express it) snares and delusions. Jenny interrupted her promptly in her first assault.

"Don't say disagreeable things about Mr. Carrick, Martha. He is my friend; nothing more, I assure you. But he *is* my friend; we can like our friends too well to hear them attacked unjustly, and you are attacking Henry Carrick unjustly when you accuse him of trifling with me. He has been very kind and courteous to me. He knew from the first that *I* knew of this engagement."

Martha drew a deep breath. Put down in this way, she could say no more. Jenny did remember his engagement, it seemed, and so—she must be left to her own devices. "What girls are coming to

nowadays I can't think," said Mrs. Martha in her husband's ear; upon which, he told her she was no more than a girl herself. As they were thus talking together in old Aunt Malcolm's pretty front sitting-room, Henry Carrick entered with Jenny. He saw the good young woman whispering, and an audacious smile crossed his face.

"There's thunder in the air," quoth he, looking seaward, where a piled-up mass of heavy clouds was rising.

A flash of lightning sparkled in Mrs. Martha's eyes. She had taken the remark to herself. The wind was really rising high, and Jenny attempted to close the window. Quite a gale seemed to be blowing in, and Henry Carrick sprang to her assistance. As he turned back, Frank held towards him a small, flat, Russia leather case he had just picked up from the floor. The cover, fallen back, disclosed a portion of a photograph, and, that, a photograph of a woman.

"Yours, Henry?"

A nod of thanks and that same curious smile again from Henry Carrick.

"That mysterious sweetheart of yours, Henry, I suppose? Come, it is time you told us something further about her, I think."

There was a certain rough decision in Frank Carrick's voice, despite his half-jocular manner. Martha saw—did *they* see?—the sudden pallor of Jenny's face at this. Was it the sight of that pallor that produced a change in Henry Carrick's demeanour? His gaiety, his lightness fled, and after an instant of hesitation, he seemed to come to a sudden resolution with an effort; an effort that brought a tinge of colour to his cheek, and a new tone into his voice. He moved his chair slightly forward, and began:

"You think I should tell you something further about my mysterious sweetheart, as you call her. I will tell you all that I know myself. About a year ago, when I was in Munich, I received a letter from my sister Kate, containing her usual badinage, her speculations and questionings about my prospect of settling in life, as she called it. She said she had heard, through friends in Paris—the Heydons, you know—that I was very attentive to a mysterious young Polish girl who had been in society for a short time there. I had met this Polish girl but three times, as it happened, and knew nothing more about her. Just after I had finished reading Kate's letter, it chanced that I went into John Carew's studio. He was studying art in Munich, as I think you have heard. On his easel, as I went in, a picture met my eyes that attracted me, for two reasons; the beauty of the face, and the strangely old-fashioned look of the dress which the figure was arrayed in. I asked who it was. He told me it was a copy he had been making of an old miniature he had brought with him from home, the portrait of his mother's grand aunt, Drusilla Carew. We examined this picture for awhile together, and then he went out to keep an engagement, leaving me to wait his return. I was sitting

directly in front of the portrait, and I had to wait there an hour. I don't mean to say that I was studying the portrait all that time; I was thinking of a hundred other things; but I found after I had left the studio that the pictured face pursued me. I went straight to a musical party where I met several distinguished artists; but through all the talk and the music, and the throng of very pretty women, every now and then I would see in my mind's eye, as we say, Miss Drusilla Carew. The next day I went again to Carew's studio, and told him how his ancestress had haunted me. He laughed and remarked: 'She's coming back to atone to one of your family, I suppose, for her perfidy in the past.' I was all at sea at this, greatly to his surprise, for he had supposed that all the Carricks knew the old family tradition. However, I heard it then and there for the first time from his lips; the old story which I dare say you know, Frank; that a certain Miss Drusilla Carew broke faith, and broke the heart of one Henry Carrick a century ago; or at any rate worked a good deal of mischief with his life."

Frank nodded. "Yes, I know that old story, Henry: but what connection has it ——"

"With *my* story, you would ask? It is the very root of it—as you will see if you have patience. After John had related the old tradition to me, he produced several photographs that he had taken of this portrait, and allowed me my choice. Evidently, he declared, Miss Drusilla had some interest in me by thus haunting me, and it was but fair that I should possess her picture: and he would enquire afterwards, when we met, how my phantom sweetheart was. Writing to Kate about this time, I carried the joke on by telling her I had at last met my fate, which I hoped would put her enquiring mind at rest; but that as things were not settled, I could not yet tell her the lady's name. John Carew unwittingly helped it on further, when writing to his brother Charles, by making mysterious mention of painting the portrait of Harry Carrick's intended. Kate spread the news right and left. Of course I intended to undeceive them at my leisure, but she and Charley went off, as you know, on their exploring tour to the world's end, and by all appearance mean to stay there. So ——"

"Then you are not engaged?" interrupted Mrs. Frank Carrick.

"Not yet," laughed Harry. "I don't know how soon I may be."

"Now, I call that a downright swindle! You ——"

"Do let him go on, Patty."

"Right, Frank; I want to go on. Three days after my return I was at a concert at St. James's Hall. Hearing a slight commotion near me, I turned to see a young lady holding out a fan, and in this young lady's face I saw that of Drusilla Carew. I believe I may have been very rude in my close observation, which I hope she has forgiven"—with a smile, and a quick glance at Jenny's face, pale and full of emotion. "But I declare I hardly knew at the moment whether I saw a vision or a reality."

"All this ought to be put in a book," breathed Martha.

"Some matters took me out of town. The day I got back I heard of your evening gathering for that night, Frank; and I thought I would make one at it. A minute after I entered your rooms I saw again the realisation of the portrait: not in the old-world attire of Drusilla Carew, but in a ravishing modern costume of airy white gossamer, with pink roses. Here's the photograph."

It was certainly Jenny's face. It was wonderful!

"Drusilla Carew was Jane Malcolm's grand-aunt," spoke Frank, "or her mother's; I forget which. But Drusilla, poor soul, didn't break the other Henry's heart, Harry: she had her's broken instead. That old Colonel and his sister—whose ward she was—made up the match between her and his nephew, Henry Carrick, who had not a sou, they say, while she was rich. Drusilla rebelled; she loved somebody else, it's said; and they shut her up in a certain Red Room of the Carrick homestead—my homestead now. There they threatened, and persecuted, and starved her, until the poor thing died of a very rapid decline. At least, that was the account given to the world. And ever since then, the story runs that at certain times and to certain persons, that cruel Colonel Carrick and his sister appear in a dream, and rehearse over again their old wicked persecution. I always thought this a great piece of humbug, until Jenny, the first night she slept in my house, and in the Red Room, too, had the dream, and then I hardly knew what to think."

"Did you dream of *me!*" asked, softly, Henry Carrick. Which question Miss Jenny wholly declined to answer, except in blushes.

But Mr. Henry Carrick took an opportunity of putting it again when they were alone. And also another question which followed naturally upon it.

"I fell in love with her that night at your house, you see," he said to Frank; "if I had not already done so at the concert."

And there was very soon a wedding at Nalem; at which Mrs. Martha played first fiddle.

"And now that they are man and wife, Frank," she said to her husband, "I do trust that dreadful room of ours will no longer be haunted."

"Never was haunted yet," returned Frank, sceptical as ever. Nevertheless, Frank cannot explain, quite to his own satisfaction, the why and the wherefore of Jenny's dream.

While Henry Carrick, listening again and again to his dear little wife's recital of it, is content to take Shakespeare's view—that there are more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy.

N. P.

THE CRUISE OF THE RESERVE SQUADRON.

By Charles W. Wood,
Author of "Through Holland," etc.

Ruined Water Tower, Alhambra.

WE left Malaga in the early morning. The railway company had provided a saloon carriage, for which we paid half as much again as the ordinary fare, but it made all the difference both to the pleasure and the comfort of our long journey. A small crowd had collected to see us off; yet, if there was anything unusual, there certainly was nothing eccentric in our appearance. Perhaps it was merely a way of showing their good-will towards Englishmen in general, and the British Navy in particular. But when the mind is awakened to a spirit of adventure, small incidents are magnified into importance above their due; and so the little crowd, whatever we were to them, became to us a source of something more than mere amusement. We looked upon them as a good omen. Certainly, if in their hearts they speeded the parting guests, their prayers were answered. Success and happiness attended us.

The train slowly left the town. The cathedral, with its one solitary tower, rose conspicuously above the houses; to the left, the long, flat, far-stretching plain, dotted about with tenements and factories, was bounded on the one side by distant hills, on the other by the clear waters of the Mediterranean; the masts of the shipping in the harbour rising like a small forest of trees, straight and bare and lifeless. Above all were the blue sky and the glowing sunshine—soon, indeed, to glow with furnace heat.

It was a most romantic journey, especially between Malaga and Bobadilla; a succession of scenes crowded with features that were new at least to one of the party, who had travelled little in Spain,

and was still unfamiliar with any land of palms and pomegranates. Throughout the day one grand feature after another excited our admiration. Vast ranges of hills, sometimes so close upon us that passages were cut between, or tunnels beneath them; or falling so far back as to melt into dreams and visions, and seem a week's journey distant. Here an immense mountain of solid rock rose out of the midst of a severe plain, guiltless of vegetation; nor tree, nor shrub, nor fern finding foothold or taking root thereon. Immense plateaux stretched around, large enough, apparently, to colonise; tracts of country that looked unproductive, uncultivated, disowned; no token of human habitation in all their vast extent; no sign of the picturesque Spanish peasant in what appeared an untrodden world, lonely, desolate and sad.

And then again, for miles and miles, hour after hour, an opposite picture. Hills and vast plains, but laughing and sunny and "running over with corn and oil." Endless extents of the aloe; orange groves, olive yards, vineyards without number; palms and myrtles; the sage-green or grey-green of the olive tree always conspicuous. Rivers ran their course and fertilised the farms, on which much care seemed to be bestowed. The country undulated in flowing outlines. Nestling under the shelter of a hill, or boldly confronting the world from the summit, one frequently saw a picturesque farmhouse, painted some bright colour; pink or yellow, or, sometimes, red; yet, however brilliant, never looking out of place or glaring or vulgar in these rich and laughing slopes and verdant valleys, this dazzling, intoxicating ether and radiant sunshine.

Picturesque houses were they, with flat roofs—for here they fear neither rain from the skies nor snow from the mountains—and verandahs to shade and subdue the rooms; and, more often than not, trellis-work holding the trailing, clinging vine, adorning the walls with grace and beauty, and suggesting rich red streams and bacchanalian banquets, at which certainly the Spanish temperament would prove no skeleton at the feast.

There was often a long interval between one house and the next, as if each farm possessed vast tracts to itself. Yet these farms require less manual labour than those of more northern climes. They consist so much of orange groves and olive yards, that they may be left very much to look after themselves, while their owners sleep away the sultry summer hours. A strange life, this turning night into day; coming out, like the owls and the bats, with the going down of the sun; finding one's pleasure and happiness and social enjoyment chiefly beneath the dark tranquil skies of night, the stars and the silvery moon. Here she should ever be at the full: though human nature, after all, most appreciates those blessings that are chequered by the shadows of occasional withdrawal.

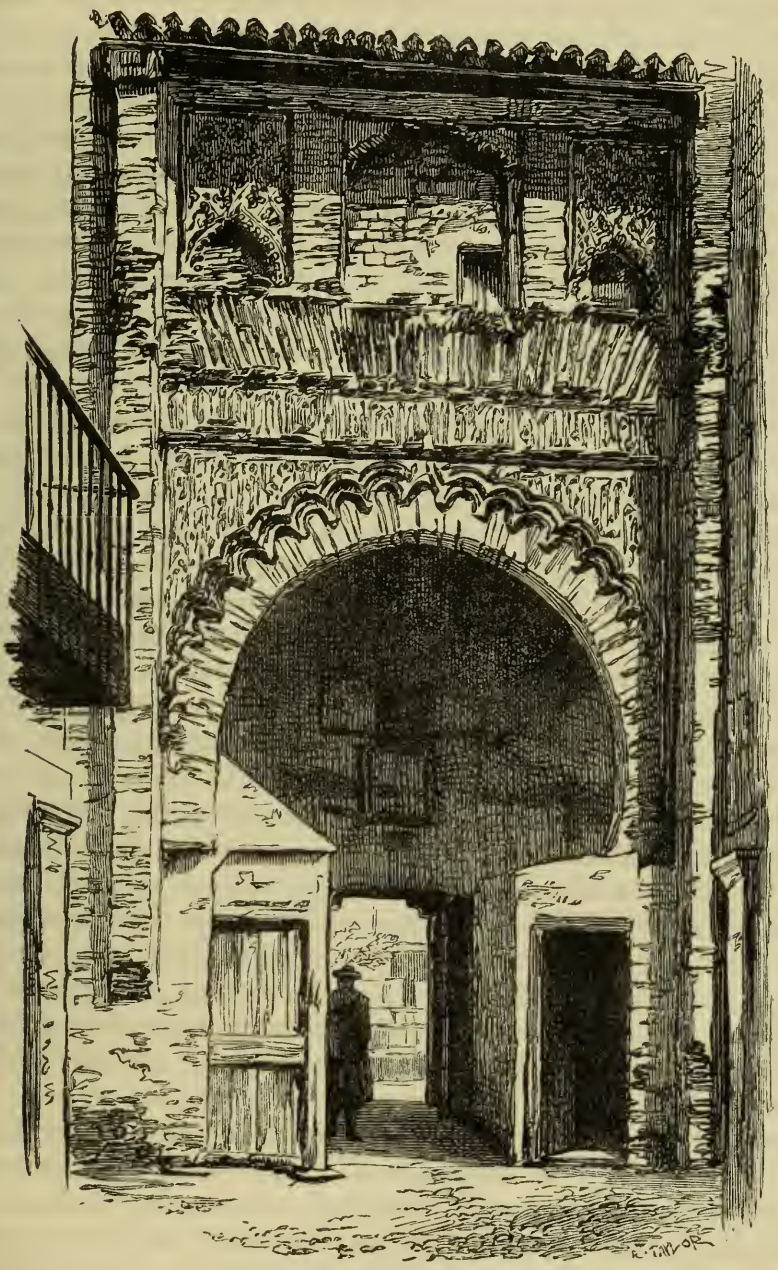
These houses, so far from any other sign of life, seem to have retired from the world. But occasionally we came to towns and

villages, and the train would halt long at a place with a romantic name, losing the precious minutes apparently for no earthly purpose but to teach us a lesson in patience. Very picturesque were some of these stations, especially when covered with the graceful vine, or brilliant with rich scarlet blooms that stretched upwards to the very roof with a glowing, gorgeous effect quite tropical in its vividness and abundance. Our tints, coming to slower maturity in a harder climate and denser atmosphere, are quieter and more subdued. But in these richer tints, which seem, as it were, to reflect the very brilliancy of the sun itself, there is no undue prominence to offend the eye; however intense, they suggest only gorgeousness, magnificence, and beauty; a wonderful tribute to the powers of reproductive creation.

The wild, grand scenery between Malaga and Bobadilla, sometimes reached the sublime. A succession of plains and valleys—lovely orange groves that make the air heavy with luscious scent when the trees are in bloom, and before the blossoms have given place to the round ripe fruit that hangs so gracefully upon the boughs—though for actual beauty the orange is inferior to the lemon tree. There were great tracts of country and distant mountains, and, especially after Alora, valleys planted with the pomegranate and the citron, and banks studded with the aloe and the prickly pear. And then we entered upon a succession of tunnels hewn out of granite hills that pressed upon us—the series of excavations some 5,000 metres long. The hills were lofty and splendidly severe. For a moment we caught sight of a magnificent gorge, deep, wild and romantic; rushing water coursed over a rocky bed in this precipitous ravine—this "valley of rocks." But no sooner was the glorious vision entered upon than it passed and was gone; tunnels once more shut out all but the darkness and obscurity.

Our first principal halt was at Bobadilla. Here twenty-five minutes were allowed for a well-arranged breakfast. A long room, two long tables, a table-d'hôte meal, abundant, not badly dressed, and quickly served by waiters. Broadley spent all his spare time in watching the capacities of a young girl seated at the table with her father. She looked about fourteen, and, we concluded, must be on her way home from school, where they had kept her on very short allowance during the whole term. A conjuror could hardly have been more expert, or produced a greater effect upon his audience, as we watched both knife and fork pressed into the service, and alternately raised with a rapidity that seemed magical, meeting half way as they went up and down, like buckets in a well. Her father watched her with fond affection and intense pride, while I was lost in wondering whether Broadley's eyes or the interesting young lady's mouth possessed greater capacities for expanding. Then a waiter came with a wooden bowl to collect the money, and before time was quite up we had returned to our places, and were ready to start again.

After Bobadilla, we went on, hour after hour, through the burden and heat of the day. The sun glared like a furnace; soda-water grew hot, ice refused to remain ice any longer; windows and blinds were put up and down, but the heat refused to be shut out, and



ANCIENT GATEWAY, GRANADA.

there was no cool air to be let in. Hour after hour we went slowly through the Province of Malaga, with its great plains, often wild and severe, lonely and lonesome. Now and then we saw workers in the fields, or men threshing out corn. Occasionally a string of picturesque peasants straggled along the roads, the girls' heads garlanded

with vine leaves, as if they were about to pay a visit to the Temple of Bacchus. Muleteers completed the picture, their "beasts of burden" well laden, and probably not altogether as indifferent to the heat as they appeared.

Less fertile and beautiful grew the scenery as we made progress; for Spain is not all voluptuous and rich in its characteristics—nor by any means so. Its mountains—it is essentially a land of mountains—are often rugged, rocky, and barren; its plains, of vast extent, so utterly abandoned, to all appearance, that they become inexpressibly sad and gloomy to the traveller. Yet is there something grand in these solitudes: you feel lost, bewildered, oppressed with a feeling of desolateness in their contemplation, almost as if you had missed your hold of life and the world. And still they appeal—as only Nature can—to one's sense of the sublime and the unbounded, just as the ocean or an immense range of snow-capped hills will often fill the mind with awe and admiration.

We came to the ancient town of Antequera—the Anticaria of the Romans—with its old Moorish castle, built upon Roman remains, and perched upon the slope of a hill—hill and castle all so much one sad, grey colour that it required a steady look to discover the building. The romantic town overlooks a great plain, which possesses a salt lake. The plain is fertile and cultivated; but romance has here and there given place to reality and enterprise in the form of great square factories. Antequera had the deserted, abandoned look which marks so many towns in Spain, where you may often see rows and streets of tenements, some without casements, some with shutters only to protect them from the noonday heat. Not a creature will be found wandering from end to end of the place. Near us rose an immense granite mass, called the "Lovers' Rock," from the summit of which two fond and foolish hearts—deluded souls!—clasped in each other's arms, are said to have thrown themselves, rather than fall into the hands of a hard-hearted, despotic parent. Beyond, like sugar-loaves, rose the three hills of Archidona. Then we passed through a long tunnel, crossed a river that to-day was almost dried up in its rocky bed, and left the Province of Malaga for that of Granada.

Next came Loja, an ancient and dilapidated town in a narrow valley, watered by the river Genil. More than one stream here makes glad the plains, and renders them abundantly fertile. Loja is famous for its fruit and crayfish, and the latter were being hawked about the station. We bought a basket, whilst we traced the course of the rapid river, whence the fish had come, sweeping downwards like a small torrent: refreshing the ancient town, that, basking between the hills of the Sierra de Ronda, in the heat of summer scarce knows how to bear its burden.

The fish were alive and beautifully packed in the little red wicker basket, covered with damp green moss and criss-crossed with string.

The man asked fifteen pence for the fish, the basket, the moss, the string, the time and the trouble, and we would have given it; but our courier insisted upon bargaining. Perhaps for the sake of keeping up the custom; or keeping down the price; perhaps because it was the right thing to do. Whatever the reason, he boldly offered half the sum. Then followed the usual drama, which ended in the man going off with the diminished amount, and seeming to think he had not done badly. On arriving at our destination the basket was duly consigned to the landlord of the hotel, with a request that its contents might reappear in the form of soup—the only thing crayfish are good for—and how delicious when it came to table!

So the afternoon wore on, and we entered into the more immediate neighbourhood of Granada; the wide sweeping plain, the avenues of trees lining and shading the long, white, dusty roads; the far-off chain of the magnificent Sierra Nevada, with its eternal, inexhaustible snows—the highest range of this mountainous country. Signs of life became more abundant; villages and houses; groups of peasants in showy costumes, sometimes passing so near that we could hear their laughter and their songs. And small idea, by the way, the Spanish peasants seem to have of music and melody. Most of their songs appear to be characterised by a Gregorian monotony, but not a Gregorian grandeur. Long drawn-out notes, suggestive of infinite dearth of invention, is the chief feature of these "songs of the people," without any trace of the wild, weird, Bohemian melodies that suit so well the guitar which the Spaniards handle with such unrivalled skill.

We passed through cultivated fields, many of them growing a tall, wavy stalk with small green leaves; a species of lemon-flavoured mint the Spaniards, and especially the Moors, make into a kind of tea, wholesome but nauseous. It is also distilled into a liqueur, more palatable, though perhaps not so harmless as the cup that only cheers. A good deal of all this smiling territory belongs to the Duke of Wellington.

Then we came in sight of Granada itself, so magnificently placed in that immense, hill-girt plain, lying under the shadow of the heights that possesses the world-famed Alhambra; echoing to the sound of rippling waters supplied from the inexhaustible snows of those far-off, sleeping mountains—the Sierra Nevada—the boast and pride even of mountainous Spain. Here the cactus and the aloe, the myrtle and the palm-tree, the pomegranate and the orange, the citron and the tall, waving Indian grass contribute to the beauty and abundance of the province. And over all, and above all, impregnating the very air, and seeming to tinge the very sky with a blue brighter than its own, is the feeling that you are on enchanted ground; about to behold a dream of dreams, a vision of years; a glory and a fame that have lived through the centuries. All is seen in a halo of romance that perhaps no other spot on earth can

claim. For here you have reached the mystic, romantic regions of the ancient Moors, the wonderful Alhambra: a place more full of dreamy charm and enchantment than all the glowing tales of Arabia, more poetical than poetry itself; where the song of the nightingale is the only fitting accompaniment to the murmur of falling waters, and surely in the very moonbeams fairies hold their courts.

OLD HOUSES ON THE DARRO, GRANADA.

Between four and five o'clock in the afternoon the train slowly steamed into Granada. Our courier, well up to his work, had telegraphed for vehicles at the station and for rooms at the hotel. The terminus lies outside the town, and in clouds of dust we were soon clattering through the tree-lined avenues, within sound of the waters of the Genil and the Darro. On through an ancient gateway that led into a narrow, ill-paved, straggling street, its houses on either side old, dirty and dilapidated; many of the casements barred like the windows of a prison: mute witnesses to a past reign of terror, when

iron bars were only too necessary to keep out the lawless and protect the weak; though they were powerless against many a well-aimed shot that shattered the glass, and stilled for ever the warm pulse beating behind it.

Sweeping round, and crossing a wide thoroughfare, we again entered a narrow, tortuous street leading up to the great Grecian gate that admits you into the hallowed precincts of the Alhambra. This reached, we immediately found ourselves within the charmed circle of the outer walls, and passed out of the broad sunlight into the grateful obscurity of a splendid avenue of trees. The ascent was steep and tolerably long, as if the magic halls of the Alhambra, like success in life, were only to be gained through toil and labour; but there was a solemnity about the approach worthy its reputation. Without these trees, where in spring you may listen to the song of the nightingale, and where to-day as we went, the rich note of the blackbird awoke echoes in the still air, the approach would not have been half so effective; and they are there thanks to the judgment of the late Duke of Wellington.

Finally, reaching the end of the Avenue—turning by the "Red Towers," and obtaining for a moment a glimpse of the sweeping plain below and the far-off mountains—we saw before us, on either side the road, a goodly pile—the two hotels within the precincts of the Alhambra; long, pleasant-looking buildings, very much resembling each other in all but name. Rooms had been reserved for us at the "Washington Irving," and we found no reason to regret the choice; probably the "Suete Suelos" would have proved equally comfortable and accommodating.

In the glow and excitement of first setting foot on this charmed soil, Broadley was handed a telegram announcing his promotion. Surely never had mortal received good news under happier circumstances, at a more fitting moment, or in better "form" for its due appreciation. Surely a brighter halo of beauty and romance was thrown over all he subsequently saw—if that were possible. And surely he were guilty of absolute callousness not to look back for ever upon that trip with feelings of unusual and extreme pleasure, wherein a "fortuitous concourse of events" had combined to thus paint the rainbow of his life.

It was now past five o'clock, and we decided to visit the Alhambra by night. First impressions are everything, and beautiful as are these legendary halls and courts, their charms are exalted to an unearthly, unreal pitch of romance by the soft silvery moonlight, so brilliant and intensified in this rarified atmosphere. We were fortunate, for to-night the moon would be at the full.

The fortress of the Alhambra was built by the Moorish kings of Granada, and capable of holding an army of 40,000 men within the shelter of its outer walls. It was situated on the crest of a lofty hill, a spur of the great Sierra Nevada chain, commanding a view of

the town, the immense surrounding plains and far-off hills: the whole forming one of the finest panoramas in the wide world. The palace of the Alhambra—all that now remains of the ancient glory of this kingly resort—forms but a small section of the territory of the Alhambra itself. Its halls and courts have passed through so many hands, experienced so much wilful destruction and alteration, the marvel is that one stone is left standing upon another. It is difficult to realise what it must have been in the days of its Moorish grandeur. The most magnificent, most gorgeous edifice of modern times sinks into insignificance and the common-place, almost into vulgarity itself, when compared with this matchless refinement, this inconceivable grace and beauty.

The outer walls are thirty feet high, and six feet wide. The name dates as far back as the 9th century, and the Red Towers, still existing, are probably the earliest portion of this marvellous structure. Parts were added at intervals during the next few centuries; but not until the year 1248 was the true and existing Alhambra commenced:—the palace that has come down to posterity, has been the delight of the world, whose very name has fallen into a proverb for all that is chaste and lovely and of good report.

The palace erected by Bàdis in the 11th century was standing, and Ibn-l-Ahmar, the founder of the Masrite dynasty, determined to build a new portion, surpassing in splendour and magnificence all that had ever been heard of or any that might exist. The palace was called Kasru-l-hamra. Ibn-l-Ahmar died, leaving the continuation of the work to his son, Mohammed II. One king after another added to its extent and beauty, which culminated about the year 1354, in the reign of Yusuf I., the richest, if not the most powerful, of all the Moorish kings. So grew the Alhambra by degrees into perfection.

Then came the conquest of Granada by the Christians, and the reign of the Moors ended with Boabdil. The Alhambra for a time continued to be a royal residence, and was inhabited by the Castilian monarchs, but in this respect its glory ceased with the Moresco-Spanish dominion in Granada. Perhaps it was too beautiful and too refined for the Roman Catholic sovereigns; or they may have thought that it savoured of heathendom, and that no blessing could rest upon it; or the marvellous pile may have suggested a voluptuous effeminacy little suited to their ideas and temperament. Whatever the cause, the sun of the Alhambra had set, and it lived on in a sort of afterglow.

It had to submit to changes and alterations, and the best was done to spoil it. Charles V. began a palace within the walls of the fortress, adjoining the ancient building; but constant shocks of earthquake, as if Nature herself protested against the sacrilege, compelled him to abandon his purpose. The walls are still standing, and upon them the eye first rests in visiting the Alhambra: walls of massive masonry, richly carved, out of all character and keeping with the fairy-like halls

and courts that would have been crushed with the weight of their presence. Fortunately nothing can be seen until you have passed beyond the offending ruins to the retired little entrance that, with the magic of an "Open Sesame," admits you at once into enchanted realms.

Philip V. and his queen, Elizabeth of Parma, early in the eighteenth century, were the last monarchs to make a residence of the Alhambra. Philip Italianised the building, and otherwise did it much harm. In the next century came the French, who would have razed it to the ground. Mines were laid, and the fuses actually lighted; but they were discovered, and put out just in time, by a corporal of Invalidos, who, for this service done to the world, ought to have been ennobled and canonised. This was about the year 1810, when the Duke of Wellington did such good service to Spain that its gratitude took the form of presenting him with a marquisate, and so much territory in the immediate neighbourhood. The French had turned the Alhambra into barracks and magazines, had destroyed, amongst other depredations, the Moorish mosque built by Mohammed III. in the fourteenth century, which is said to have been without parallel in the world.

Seeing then that, in spite of chances and changes, so much of the Alhambra remains to this day, no wonder it has been said to bear a charmed existence. And truly, were it to disappear from the face of the earth, it would be a calamity for all time.

This enchanted territory we were about to see for ourselves. The dinner-hour would not yet sound, and the moment had come for the view from the "Watch-Tower," the Torre de la Vela; most effective and most beautiful when, towards sunset, the lights and shadows are strong upon the vast plain, and a golden glow precedes the fleeting purple of twilight.

We entered a narrow, up-hill pathway, the broad avenue to the left, with its giant elms, which grew tall and straight as poplars, and did not spread their branches. Cherry-trees of amazing height, tall and straight as the elms, found place amongst them. Birds sang in the leaves, which the courier declared were nightingales, but we felt were simply blackbirds and thrushes; songsters only less beautiful than the one songster that outrivals all others. To the right, beside the path, a stream rippled and murmured; one of the many tributaries that make of Granada a plain of running waters, wonderfully fertile; in summer combining a southern richness with almost the cool breezes of the north.

We reached a square, massive, Moorish tower, the Gate of Justice; so-called because, during the Moslem reign, all petty trials were heard and judged within its porch—an ancient custom, frequently alluded to in Holy Writ. The arch, of horse-shoe form, and half the height of the building, was noble and imposing. In the centre, on the keystone, was engraved a hand; and within the arch, on

the keystone of the portal, was traced a key. One tradition holds that the hand was intended as the emblem of Doctrine; the key, that of Faith. Another, that the Moors engraved the symbols, declaring no Christian should pass within the walls until the hand came down, grasped the key, and threw wide the gates. The latter interpretation, as approaching nearest to the marvellous, the mysterious, and the magical, most commended itself to our guide. Again, it has been said that the open hand was merely intended to represent hospitality—a duty so sacred in the East, that, once eat salt with a man in his own tent, and you may rely upon his after fidelity. And, yet once more, tradition has it that the device was simply meant to act as a talisman against the "evil eye."

We passed into a narrow lane, between high walls, which led upwards, and ended in a square opening, called the Place of the Cisterns. Here a deep well was supplied from great reservoirs cut in the rock beneath by those wonderful Moors, who seemed as persevering and successful in all they undertook, as in their tastes they were refined and cultivated. It almost made one shudder to look into the black depth, drop a pebble and listen to the far-off splash. Our guide lowered the bucket that stood on the circular brick-enclosure, and presently brought up a supply of icy water, of which nearly everyone, out of mere curiosity, took a draught. An Eastern well, but no Rebecca waiting for any Isaac. Probably many Rebeccas have in their time waited here for many Isaacs, and will wait again.

Then we went on to the Torre de la Vela, where a summons at the door raised within a shrill female scream, and finally brought forth a custodian who looked as old as the building itself, and far more tottering. But he gave us admittance, and led the way up the steep, dark, well-worn staircase to the summit of the tower—a roof some twenty feet square, more or less, open to all the cardinal points, and on one side a silver bell swung in a sort of gibbet.

And what a scene was here disclosed! We gazed upon what is said to be one of the three finest, most extensive and most romantic panoramas in the world. Turn which way we would, nothing but beauty and grandeur met the eye. The sun was sinking westward, and in the vast plain a far-off mist was slowly creeping upwards like a sun-flushed, inflowing tide. The tower was built on the spur of the hill, and we looked down into quite precipitous depths. At our feet lay the town, the cathedral conspicuous in its midst; streets were clearly traced, and white houses gleamed. The palm tree raised its head; the cactus, the myrtle and the prickly pear abounded.

The Darro ran its course between banks picturesque and shady with trees. Far as the eye could reach stretched the wonderful plain of the Vega, bounded on the west by a range of hills, where our guide pointed out ancient towns and hoary battlements that had rather to be taken upon trust. Here and there, indeed, we noted a

solitary watch-tower that must have done good service in ancient days, whence many a decisive battle was followed in its course, and kingdoms rose and fell between sunrise and sunset. Defiles, just perceptible, led up the mountains into a world beyond. Wild, cold and desolate they looked, yet strangely interesting as imagination peopled them with the countless armies that have passed through them to victory or defeat. And one vision stood out above all others: that of poor Boabdil, conquered, exiled, passing through the plain, entering the pass, looking back upon his beloved country, and weeping over his downfall; all that was gentle and sad in him rising

GATE OF JUSTICE, ALHAMBRA.

to the surface as he slowly went on his way to the land of Morocco, where, in fighting for another's country, he was to lose the life he had not hazarded to save his own. Far off, in the centre of the Vega, reposed the city of Santa Fé.

Higher and more glorious than all was the snowy range of the Sierra Nevada; those mountains that are the boast of Grenada, and like a beacon are visible and seem to overshadow the province from end to end; even to the shores of the Mediterranean and far-off Gib; for Broadley and I had noted them from the watch-tower on the top of the rock; had seen them looking like dream hills belonging to another world, reaching into the heavens. It is the highest range in Spain; its snows are eternal, in summer ever melting, yet never

exhausted; feeding the streams that, supplying the plains with water, render them especially fertile and beautiful; rich in orange groves and olive yards, vineyards and fruit-laden orchards; all of which we traced in one immense field of abundance from the Torre de la Vela.

On the opposite side, almost lost in the vast surrounding, reposed the wonderful Alhambra, and still nearer and more conspicuous, the ruder walls of Charles V.'s palace. Nothing of the Alhambra's peculiar beauty was visible: a few roofs and towers, a small dome, sections like the lines on a map—this was all; the whole overhanging a steep precipice or ravine. And down, under the slope of the hill, were the caves of the gipsies, with their low, mysterious little doorways that gave admittance—to what sort of a life? The slopes were covered with the prickly pear. Higher up the hill, and overlooking the Alhambra, was the palace of the Generalife, with its picturesque gardens, once the summer resort of the kings of Granada. Enclosing all in a straggling, oblong form, the outer walls, turret-crowned at intervals, surrounded the whole territory of the ancient fortress.

The sun sank lower, and the golden mist in the plains of the Vega, crept up slowly, and ascended like incense, veiling, not blotting out the landscape. The snow-capped Sierra Nevada grew flushed and rosy; here and there, some object, bright as a shield, caught the sun's reflection, and flashed and glowed like a thing of fire. The murmur of running streams might be faintly heard; a sound refreshing and romantic at all times, but especially so here. The town lay at our feet, cool, calm, deserted-looking—and compared with its ancient glory, it may indeed be called a dead city. The white walls of the houses, with their picturesque red roofs, stood out in exquisite contrast and colouring with the surrounding scene.

Suddenly the old man pulled a rope from below and struck a blow upon the silver bell, whose vibrations went floating into the vast space. It has to be tolled so many times an hour between 9 P.M. and 4 A.M., and on a still night may be heard thirty miles off. It is a comparatively small bell, but the light atmosphere conveys sound to incredible distances. Some say it is an old custom intended to frighten away the Evil One—like the griffins and gargoyles on our cathedrals, which certainly might well have a corresponding effect upon all Good Influences: but in reality it is meant as a signal to the irrigators in the plains, who, at their work all night, have to alternately open and close the sluices. Yet it was not quite easy to fathom the mystery of this arrangement, from the description presently given to us by the landlord of the "Washington Irving."

After long gazing from all quarters of the tower, coming back to each one over and over again, we reluctantly turned from the marvellous scene. I almost think we left there our hearts, whilst in our memories would certainly be found its undying traces. Once more down the winding narrow staircase, even as we had gone up: and at the bottom a youthful Rebecca—no doubt curious, like all

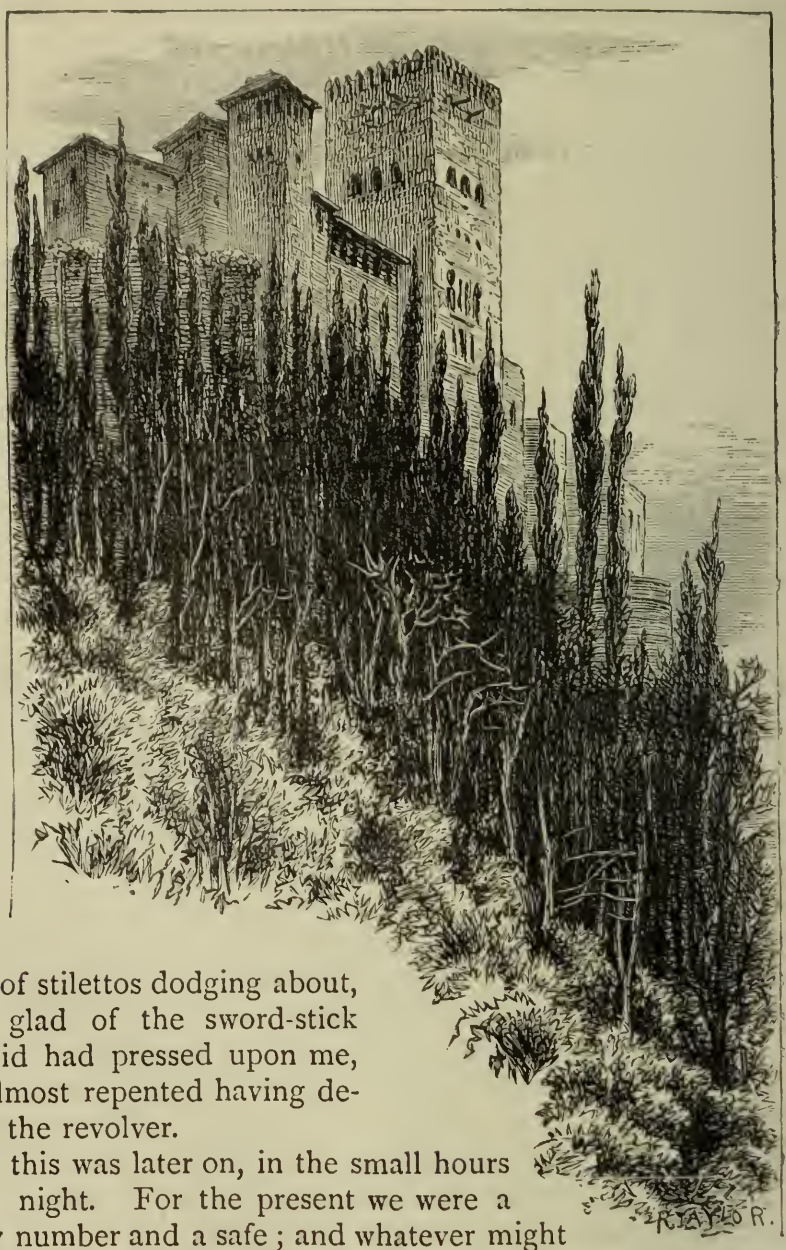
the daughters of Eve—waiting to open the outer door for us and admit us to freedom. But she was the old custodian's daughter—the child of his old age—the apple of his eye—and possibly the plague of his life. No sooner in sight of her than he sternly banished her to unseen regions and took her place, an equally efficient, but not equally comely substitute. The maiden, not to be baffled (when are they ever, these daughters of Eve?) as we went down the narrow pathway to the Square of the Cisterns, waved us a farewell from a casement just wide enough to admit a bewitching arm, and a face wreathed in melancholy smiles. Somehow she made me think of the Fair Maid of Peake, who had thrown the lily at Arosa Bay, and was then languishing in captivity.

Down past the palace, and the office of the architect: the latter full of beautiful models of Alhambra doors and windows and courts, and Alhambra vases, which may all be purchased for a consideration—so that you may carry away with you a fragment of the very atmosphere and romance of the place. Onward into the shady avenue, where the birds still sang, and the brook still rippled on its way. We trod upon air; we were living in a dream; we were in the enchanted land of the Arabian Nights. Surely the Slave of the Lamp would appear, and the trees would sparkle with jewels, and caves would open and admit us into dazzling realms.

But on reaching the hotel, and coming back to the ruder needs of life, we felt, with Lord Byron, that it was a pity the pleasures of the table should be a necessity of existence. Yet no one probably took his seat with positive reluctance, or objected to the recherché repast specially prepared for our benefit. Even Broadley, after one suggestive, inquisitive glance as to whether I would second him, ventured not to utter the mysterious syllables of Shandy-gaff, but went in for the light, sparkling, refreshing wines of the country. He, indeed, had cause above and beyond us all, for viewing everything through couleur de rose, in an enchanted oriental atmosphere; for he alone had received a telegram burdened with good news: news that some have waited for all their lives, and left the world still waiting.

The moments sped, darkness fell, and the moon rose round as a shield, full of a "divine effulgence;" apparently twice the size, and giving twice the light of a northern atmosphere. Now for the first view of the Alhambra by moonlight. Once more we ascended the grove. The birds were hushed, but the brook still sang its song. Here and there might be heard the twang of a guitar, and groups of idlers lounged about the walls overlooking the avenue and the town. Some of them appeared suspicious, as they cast backward glances at us over their shoulders. Were any of them the mysterious, treacherous banditti, lying in wait for one's life *and* one's money, foretold by Pyramid prophetic? They looked the character to the very life. There were women as well as men; bold, gipsy-looking women, sauntering arm in arm up and down beside the walls of

the Palace of Charles V., breaking out every now and then into that wailing song, so weird, so eminently disagreeable. These, harmless enough, were taking the evening air and enjoying the moonlight. But presently, when our number had diminished to two, and under the shadow of the trees we seemed to see brigand forms and the



gleam of stilettos dodging about, I felt glad of the sword-stick Pyramid had pressed upon me, and almost repented having declined the revolver.

But this was later on, in the small hours of the night. For the present we were a goodly number and a safe; and whatever might be lurking in the minds of these gentlemen of the grove, they confined their polite attentions to looks only. On we went, in the full moonlight glory, past the long, straight walls of Charles V.'s palace, and, turning to the right, entered a short pathway, terminating in a modest portal. A bell echoed in the night silence, the doorway opened noiselessly and as if by magic: and in a moment, one by one, we entered upon enchanted ground, and passed into another world.

A DULL SPRING DAY.

By the Author of "Countess Violet."

IT ought to have been a spring day, but it was not. People dated their letters the 10th of April, but the boldest crocus shivered as it stood, for a steady wintry wind penetrated every corner.

In London, the situation was rendered more inconsolable by a thick fog; and as the previous day had been blest with a gentle shower, and a genial glimpse of sunlight afterwards, the public made the most of their grievance, and had our favourite topic, the weather, continually uppermost.

It is all very well for foreigners to laugh at us for always speaking of the weather when we meet; but only a few of them can guess what a charmingly varied subject it is with us. As we never rise in the morning without three anxious thoughts—What is the sky like? What does the glass show? and, What is the last warning from America?—weather may be said to form part of the earnest business of our lives.

In a comfortable dining-room two girls were earnestly conversing. One, bright and dark, with a clever face and charming figure, was seated on the table; and in that position was enabled to look down upon a small, fair beauty, who had happened to don a becoming spring costume in the east wind, and had consequently caught a violent cold.

"It is too provoking!" she murmured, in a thick tone; "I shall have a sealskin jacket and a lace mantle side by side all the summer, after this, for fear of accidents."

"Nonsense, Gladys! You will be all right to-morrow."

"Very likely," said Gladys, resentfully; "but that is a day too late. *He* is going to call to-day, Olive."

"Which 'he,' dear?" innocently demanded the cousin.

"Never mind. Someone who said he would call this morning. And now I can't see him!"

"Why? You're not ill; you are only ——"

"A fright! Look at my nose!"

Certainly, it was swollen. There was a watery, feeble look about the eyes, too, that denoted the condition we all know so well; the frame rendered limp and helpless by unexpected sneezing, dainty dishes tasteless, and gruel and mustard the only things to be cultivated. We stupidly listen to the finest conversation with lips partially open, vacantly wondering whether a cough or a sneeze will be the next shock.

A loud double knock caused Gladys to jump from her chair.

"There he is! *Do* run up to the drawing-room, Olive! Mother won't be there for hours; he is so early."

"My dear Gladys, can't he wait till my aunt ——"

"Please, Miss Olive," interrupted the footman, "will you be so good as to go to the drawing-room, my mistress says?"

Away went Olive, laughing to herself. Was she not the poor, dependent relative, obliged to be ready for any emergency? Still, she lingered on the staircase, smelt the flowers, and pulled off a dead leaf or two. Gladys's lovers did not interest Olive as a rule—there were so many of them—and Olive had a romantic little secret of her own: a secret which had been as a talisman to her for the two years that had elapsed since she lost her father and her far-away home in a country parsonage.

"Some fair-haired boy is clinging nervously to his hat, I suppose," she ruminated scornfully, as she mounted the last flight. "What a disappointment it will be when he sees *me!*"

So, with a slightly mocking smile on her pretty mouth, she turned the handle of the door.

Wondrous change! No boy stood to meet her, but a fine, bronzed man; and Olive turned pale and trembled.

"*You*, William! Gladys said ——"

"Never mind what the pretty cousin said, my darling; I owe her a debt of gratitude for telling me where to find you."

And such unmistakable love and happiness shone in the eyes meeting her own that all Olive's resolution was needed to enable her to continue.

"Sir William, did ——"

"What have I done that you should call me names?"

"I mean," stammered Olive—"did you get my letters after my father's death?"

"Not until yesterday," gravely responded Sir William, a look of pain crossing his fine face. "There has been treachery, my dear. But all that is over now, and ——"

A loud rustle of silk and jingle of bangles caused Olive to start aside; and she made her escape from the room as her voluminous aunt entered it.

Gladys, in the morning-room, was looking out through a crack of the door as Olive appeared.

"Isn't he handsome?" hoarsely whispered the beauty.

"No. Yes—not very!" gasped Olive, running past and up stairs, as fast as she could go.

"Olive!"

It was no use to call her, for she locked herself in her chamber until tea-time; when her aunt, Mrs. Cornwallis, informed her that, as Gladys could not possibly go that night to the ball for which they were engaged, she might go in her place.

"I should not go at all, but Sir William Maynard had arranged to

accompany us," said Mrs. Cornwallis, gloomily drinking her tea. "It is really *too* provoking that Gladys should have caught this cold."

Olive said nothing. She felt almost guilty; yet she had not planned or plotted for her present happiness.

When the carriage was announced, Olive, in her pretty ball-dress, entered the drawing-room, where her aunt and Sir William Maynard were waiting.

"How long you have been, Olive!" cried Mrs. Cornwallis.

"I have only my gloves to button now, aunt," replied Olive.

"Allow me," said Sir William, and Mrs. Cornwallis swept on towards the door while the gloves were being fastened. When the young people entered the carriage, Olive's blushing face was revealed by the light of the lamps.

"Your gloves took some time!" remarked her aunt, drily.

"There were eight buttons to each, dear madam," said Sir William, impressively. "And as I fastened the sixteenth, Olive promised to be my wife."

"Your wife!" faltered Mrs. Cornwallis; "Olive!"

"Sir William was poor papa's pupil long ago, Aunt Clara," Olive shyly explained. "We have known each other many years."

Aunt Cornwallis, who has always looked down upon her niece because her father profited by his clerical education and took pupils (instead of enjoying his poverty, as his family would have preferred), offered her congratulations somewhat grudgingly; but recovered herself later in the evening at finding her own importance increased by the brilliant marriage her niece was about to make.

NIGHTFALL.

Soft dews are falling,
Song-birds are calling,
Hushed is the hour when daylight has fled:
Wild roses paling,
Perfume exhaling,
One by one lightly their petals they shed.

Lo! the sun dying,
O'er cloudlets flying
Flings his red banner till crimson they be:
Hush! daylight fadeth,
Darkness invadeth
Earth, as the night falls on meadow and lea.

E. L.

MRS. CARR'S COMPANION.

By M. G. Wightwick, Author of "In Lands of Palm."

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. CARR'S "PLAIN SPEAKING."

VIOLA was not so easily to forget the uncomfortable episode of her interview with Colonel Kane's nephew at the railway station.

Rose Egerton recovered from her cold, and as soon as she could leave her room, started to pay the long-talked-of visit to her old schoolfellow at South Kensington, just in time to escape two or three days of dreary fog and incessant rain, during which no visitors penetrated into the Archdeacon's household, except his neighbours in the Close, who, being weather-bound, took the opportunity of dropping in for tea and talk. Even Mrs. Carr came in for her share of callers, bringing choice morsels of gossip to regale the recluse. Colonel Kane, his attraction to St. Brenda's gone, remained at the Abbey, superintending various alterations, which were to make the place more worthy of his future bride. His nephew also was absent, spending a fortnight's leave in town.

On one of these afternoons, Mrs. Carr sat propped up as usual close to the fire, looking discontentedly every now and then towards the window, where a monotony of falling rain-drops made a cheerless prospect.

"Where can Miss Keith be?" she exclaimed, for at least the twentieth time within an hour. "Walton! do go to her room and see if she is not back. I can't understand it."

With a suppressed sigh, Walton obeyed her impatient mistress, and now returning from her quest for the fifth time, was accompanied by the object of it.

"I am sorry to have left you so long, Mrs Carr," began Viola. "I had to go to seven shops before I could match your ribbon; and the rain was so heavy that when I came home I was obliged to change my dress."

"H'm! I thought, perhaps, you were again detained by company more agreeable than mine. You can go, Walton. Come here, child!" Then, scarcely waiting for the maid to be out of hearing: "What is all this I hear about you? Don't you know it is against Lady Mary's rules for her young people to be gadding at the station after dusk, as you did the other day? Especially when they make themselves conspicuous by têtes à tête with young men! What have you to say for yourself, pray?"

"I went to the station because your niece asked me to get her a

book," Viola answered, gently. But the soft answer did not avert the wrath which had been accumulating for an hour past.

"Not expecting, of course, to find Captain Kane there?" was the next question, uttered with biting emphasis. Viola was silent, though her colour rose as usual beneath the gaze of those keen eyes.

"No defence, I see. No; wait a minute." Viola, with head proudly raised, was turning away; there were limits even to her endurance; but Mrs. Carr caught her arm and held her fast, so that she must have used force to free herself. "It is but right you should know that you have made yourself the talk of the Close; aye, and of St. Brenda's also, for aught I know."

As Mrs. Carr worked herself up she raised her voice, and disregarding the closing of the ante-room door and the sweep of a dress which announced someone's approach, continued:

"In *my* time it was considered unmaidenly and immodest for girls to run after young men, or to put themselves in the way of being talked about. And you are quite mistaken if you imagine that Captain Kane admires you; for Rose once asked him, and he said he did not. I dare say my plain speaking is not agreeable, but it is my duty to warn you for your own good; so pray remember to give me no such cause of complaint in future."

Mrs. Carr having thus done "her duty," with a pleasure and zest arising, perhaps, from a satisfied conscience, loosed her hold of her companion's arm; and, quivering with indignation, Viola turned to find herself face to face with Lady Mary—Lady Mary, whose expression told that she had heard all! Viola could bear no more.

Shielding her burning cheeks with her hands, she hurried past, looking neither to right nor left, and gaining her own room, flung herself upon the couch in an agony of grief.

Passionate sobs shook her slight frame as she cowered among the cushions, hiding her face from the daylight, and so absorbed that she did not even hear a light tap at the door, and a step on the floor beside her.

"Miss Keith! What is the matter? I am afraid my aunt has been tormenting you, as usual!"

That clear, high-bred voice could only belong to Olive Egerton, and hers was the compassionate hand laid so gently on Viola's hot head. But she only pressed her face into the pillows, to conceal the tears which were now falling fast.

"I was in the ante-room when you rushed past," Olive continued; "and—I could not help hearing what Aunt Charlotte said ——"

"Oh! she was cruel! insulting!" gasped Viola, between her sobs. "That man, too, for whom I could never feel anything but contempt!"

"Never mind what she says; it is only her horrid way!"

"But your mother!—Mrs. Carr often says disagreeable things when we are alone—but what can your mother think of me! I almost wish—I—had never—come here!"

"Don't say that, Viola!—I may call you Viola, may I not?—My mother will forget in time, though for a while, perhaps, she may think hardly of you. That is, if it is not all Close gossip, if—if you did really ——"

Viola groaned. "Yes, I did really meet him—there's no denying it, though it was not, as Mrs. Carr said, because—Ah! how *dared* she say it! How can I ever look your mother in the face again, and have her think such cruel things of me!" Then, suddenly lifting a pathetic tear-stained face: "Miss Egerton! I can't explain why I went, but you don't believe *that* of me, do you?"

The painful colour spread once more over cheek, and brow, and throat, as she put out a timid hand in deprecation of Olive's harsh judgment. Olive, moved partly by pity for the victim, partly by indignation against her oppressor, stooped and drew Viola into a warm embrace.

"Never fear; I won't believe anything but that you are an innocent victim of Aunt Charlotte and the St. Brenda gossips. She has had heaps of visitors this afternoon, all brimful of malice, no doubt. It's the weather. Why, I myself feel quite uncharitable—towards Aunt Charlotte, at all events. Cheer up, you poor child!"

Viola clung to her with piteous helplessness, and for a moment the aching head sank wearily on Olive's shoulder. Then, recovering, she drew herself up and dried her tears, as though ashamed of having given way.

"How kind you are! Thank you so much! I must try and bear it, for it is my own fault, after all. But, oh! what shall I do if Lady Mary speaks to me about it?"

Olive looked grave. "I am afraid you must be prepared for that. "Mamma is very strict about such things; but she is just, and she could not be spiteful, like Aunt Charlotte. Trust her as much as you can, and remember that you have one friend who will not think the worse of you, let Aunt Charlotte say what she may."

Viola's fears were not realised; but as days went on she came to think the alternative even worse, and almost longed for an opportunity of justifying herself. From that unlucky afternoon there dated a change in Lady Mary's manner to Viola, who found the relapse from gracious friendliness into cold looks and severe politeness very hard to bear. Yet appearances were against her, she knew, and justified Lady Mary's displeasure; but, oh! it was hard to lose the coveted place in her esteem for so slight a cause! "Just, too, as I really think she was beginning to like me a little!" mused Viola, disconsolately. "She has always called me 'my dear' lately, instead of that formal 'Miss Keith,' which grates upon me so dreadfully. Now that is all at an end, and I must begin again at the very beginning, even if I am able to stay here at all!"

Yet, in the midst of her dejected musings, came the recollection of Olive's kind attempts at consolation, bringing a cheering sense of

comfort to her desolate, sore heart. It was needed in the dreary experience which followed.

Mrs. Carr, having vented her ill-humour, reverted no more to the subject of her lecture, but Lady Mary's silence or frigid speech alike breathed disapproval; it was evident that her trust in Viola was gone. Rose, amid the enjoyment of her London visit, living in a whirl of excitement from morning to night, little guessed, or even cared, for the heavy penalty which Viola was paying for her indiscretion. She had other things to occupy her; and it is to be surmised that, in these days, her thoughts seldom dwelt long upon St. Brenda's or anyone belonging to it.

Olive, on the contrary, with the generous chivalry of her nature, warmed to Viola in her trouble, making unusual demonstrations of friendship. She was quick to note the nervous trembling of the expressive mouth, the instantaneous flushing and paling of the cheek, which told that a laconic answer or chilling glance had wounded Viola's sensitive feelings; and her silent championship often served to temper the bitter blast of Lady Mary's displeasure.

"I wonder you care so much," said Olive, one day, when Viola's gentle, fawn-like eyes had silently filled with tears as Lady Mary swept away, after administering one of the cold rebuffs which the poor girl found it so hard to endure.

"Ah! you do not know!" answered Viola, with a sigh that was eloquent. "I did so value your mother's good opinion; and now it is gone, perhaps for ever! She disapproves of me—she does not even care for us to be much together."

"What nonsensical idea will you take into your head next, I wonder!" was Olive's vigorous comment.

"Did you not notice how displeased Lady Mary looked at lunch, when you called me by my Christian name? She is afraid we shall become too intimate, and that I shall harm you. Oh! why did Mrs. Carr try to poison her mind against me!"

Indeed, it was evident that any open manifestation of Olive's sympathy for Viola was displeasing to her mother. Once or twice she interfered to prevent the girls making a shopping expedition together, or she would throw some hindrance in the way of a proposed walk. For some time, unsuspecting Viola had been unconscious of these manœuvres, but she now began to realise with acute pain that the obstacles thrown in the way of her friendly intercourse with Olive were not accidental.

It was well that Captain Kane's absence spared her the embarrassment of meeting him under present circumstances. When he came in unexpectedly one evening, about three weeks later, bringing a message from his uncle to Rose (who had only returned that day) about a skating expedition that was to come off on the following morning, Viola had become so absorbed in her troubles themselves as to have forgotten that he was the original cause of them. She

met him, therefore, with complete unconcern, coolly acknowledged his greeting, and a moment later had completely forgotten his existence in her amusement at something the Archdeacon was saying.

Looking up suddenly, a few minutes later, she found Lady Mary's eyes fixed upon her with a curiously searching expression. Recollection awoke with a rush, she started and coloured, and bent her head over her work.

"Miss Keith, will you hold this skein of silk for me?"

It was Lady Mary's voice, the first time for two or three weeks that she had voluntarily addressed her. Grateful for even this mite of returning good-will, Viola came eagerly forward to do the little service, thankful to find herself shielded from observation in the quiet corner by Lady Mary's work-table, able at leisure to recover her serenity, while the hum of talk continued all around her. By the time the silk was ready for use she had completely forgotten herself again, and could retire upstairs comparatively happy, with the echo of Lady Mary's good-night, in kinder tones than she had heard from her for many a day, still sounding in her ears.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CATASTROPHE.

THE frost continued. A slight shower of snow had fallen during the night and picked out with unerring pencil each beautiful detail of the Cathedral architecture. The noble grey towers rose outlined in snow against the clear blue sky; the delicate tracery of the leafless trees in the Close sparkled and shone. Eleven silver-clear strokes from St. Brenda's great clock-tower rang through the frosty air, and at the same moment the jingling bells of Colonel Kane's smart sleigh announced the departure of the skating-party.

Rose, brighter and prettier than ever wrapped in handsome furs, sat in front beside the sleigh's owner, admiring his spirited horses as they bounded forward. Olive occupied the back seat with John Thorold, whom Colonel Kane at the last moment had invited to join the party. A groom was to accompany them as outrider. Mrs. Bythesea, who had volunteered to act as chaperone, was already en route with a party of young people, and Captain Kane and some of his brother officers were also to meet them at the place of rendez-vous—a large piece of water hidden among the hills some eight miles away.

The day passed more quickly with the merry party of skaters picnicking and enjoying themselves in the bright open country, indifferent to cold or fatigue, than with some of those they had left behind in the Close. Lady Mary had made the best of herself during breakfast that neither of her girls might lose their day's

pleasure on her account, but now that the party was safely under weigh she confessed to a nervous headache, and forswearing luncheon and visitors, retired to her own room, hoping that entire rest and quiet might restore her before the skating-party returned to a late dinner. Her own maid was away for a holiday, which, perhaps, accounted for her small personal arrangements being less comfortable than usual. A stupid housemaid had built up her fire with more zeal than discretion, so that it roared like a furnace and made the room almost unbearable. In self-defence she was obliged to leave her door open. For some little time the sounds in the house prevented her from falling into the much-longed-for sleep, and before the uneasy, disturbed slumber had half run its course she was roused again by the noise of the Venetian blinds flapping against the window and falling like sledge-hammers upon her aching head.

A light step sounded in the corridor. "Walton! is that you?" she called in despair.

A slight figure that certainly did not belong to Walton appeared in the doorway, and was mirrored in the old-fashioned cheval-glass opposite Lady Mary's sofa. "It is I," said Viola Keith's gentle voice. "Shall I call Walton for you?"

"Yes, if you will. I want her to alter these blinds. The noise they make is distracting."

Viola hesitated, then stepped shyly across the threshold.

"May I arrange them for you, Lady Mary?"

A day or two ago she would not have ventured the offer for fear of a rebuff, but that one little kindness overnight had emboldened her.

"You may try, if Walton is not there."

Quietly and quickly closing the door behind her, she opened the window and fastened the blinds to their supports, so that they still kept the room in pleasant twilight.

"That is better, thanks."

Lady Mary shut her eyes with a sigh of relief. As the soft footfall paused near her couch she opened them again. "Do you see any eau-de-Cologne anywhere? My maid is out, and Susan is so stupid."

Viola found the bottle on the dressing-table and put it within reach.

"Ah! thank you!"

Lady Mary's eyes closed again and her brows contracted with pain. The beautiful statuesque face looked so severe in repose that Viola half-wondered at her own audacity as, taking a handkerchief from a sachet which lay near, she mixed some of the eau-de-Cologne with water and laid the cool application with careful fingers upon Lady Mary's burning forehead. A murmur of thanks acknowledged the venturesome act.

Some minutes went by, the pleasantest Lady Mary had experienced all day. Then, the pain somewhat allayed, she opened her eyes. "You here still, Miss Keith?"

"Yes. Can I do nothing more for you before I go?" The tones were wistful and betrayed more trepidation than Viola was aware of.

Lady Mary smiled inwardly. She was accustomed to be as much feared as liked by her surroundings, and perhaps rather prided herself upon the feeling of awe she inspired. "No, no. You can spend your leisure time more pleasantly than in this warm room. Go and enjoy yourself."

The prohibition was not so decided but that it left an opening for another attempt.

"Indeed, Lady Mary, if you would only let me stay and wait on you, I should like nothing else half so well!"

The eager voice made its impression. "But you were going out," said Lady Mary, half inclined to yield.

"No matter; I would far rather be useful to you here."

"Well, you may read to me a little, if you like. I cannot sleep while my head is so troublesome. There was a grey book lying somewhere ——"

"Here it is; Kingsley's life. I will begin where the mark is put in. But first let me moisten the handkerchief again."

After the first few pages, Viola's reading purposely became less animated, her pleasant voice fell gradually into a soothing monotone, and before long she had the satisfaction of seeing the serene expression and hearing the deep regular breathing which told that her listener slept. Even then she would not risk disturbing her by a sudden pause. Very gradually she lowered her voice till it died away into silence, and then she sat on, not liking to move, watching the sleeper's placid, beautiful face, with an admiration she would not have dared express. "Oh! if she would only let me love her!" she murmured to herself. "If she would love me ever so little!"

Unconsciously as she gazed the tears gathered in her eyes and began to fall gently and noiselessly like a summer shower. She dared not move to brush them away, and her face was still wet, and her eyelashes dewy when presently Lady Mary's voice made her start, and she found the deep hazel eyes, which were the very counterpart of Olive's, open and fixed upon her, enquiringly.

"What is it, my dear? You have helped me to such a refreshing sleep! What can I do for you in return?"

To Lady Mary's surprise, Viola came and knelt beside the couch, hiding her face. "Oh, Lady Mary! Are you not ever going to forgive me?" she cried, in a choked voice.

Lady Mary sat up, wondering greatly, yet half-smiling.

"Why, child! What is my good opinion to you that you should care so much about it?"

Viola raised her tear-stained face with an agonised, searching expression towards the pale one bending over her. She seemed to have formed some desperate resolution. But before she could open her

lips a tap at the door startled them both. Ah! on what strange momentary chances the events of life seem sometimes to hang! She rose, brushed away her tears, and composed herself once more into Mrs. Carr's quiet, reserved companion.

"Come in!" cried Lady Mary, impatiently.

"It is Captain Kane, my lady," announced Susan from the doorway. "I said you gave orders not to be disturbed, but he wants to see you very particular."

Lady Mary was on her feet even before Susan had finished speaking: "Captain Kane! and alone! Something must have gone wrong with the skating party!" Gathering up the shawl which Viola wrapped round her, she hastened downstairs, and Viola, too anxious to remain behind, slowly followed. Reaching the foot of the stairs, she heard Lady Mary's voice at the other end of the hall exclaiming, "Safe! Rescued! What do you mean? Captain Kane, tell me at once what has happened!"

In a moment Viola was at Lady Mary's side, fearing for her the effect of any agitation. She need not have been afraid. The hand which had unconsciously grasped hers tightened its hold, but the tall queenlike figure gave no other evidence of emotion. Captain Kane's story was soon told, though even his fluency failed sometimes under the gaze of those earnest eyes.

There had been an accident. During a game of cross-touch in the early part of the afternoon, Rose Egerton, in chasing her challenger, had unwarily skated too near a corner of the pond where the ice was thin; it broke under her weight, and she fell into the water. The object of her pursuit had meantime glided swiftly away, the game swept the other players to the further side of the pond, and for a few moments no one noticed her disappearance. When the meaning of the sharp, sudden cry of distress, half-drowned in the ring of many merry voices, became known, and the skaters hurried to the spot in alarm and agitation, it was to find Olive (who had fortunately been resting close at hand, near the bank) bending over the dark hole in the ice, her left arm wound firmly round the branch of a tree, which luckily stretched just above the water, and her right hand grasping her sister, who had by this time risen to the surface.

"It was the most plucky thing possible!" said Captain Kane, enthusiastically. "There was only the torn edge of thin ice between her and the water, but when I and another fellow would have jumped in to the rescue, she called to us to stop, and remained in that dangerous position until Thorold came running up with a ladder he had brought from the boat-house. Then Miss Egerton cried out that he must make haste, for her strength was failing her. He laid the ladder across the hole, crept out upon it as cautiously as he could, and dragging your daughter out of the water by a wonderful exertion of strength, put her safe into my uncle's arms. He had not been on

the pond when the accident happened, and had just come up, almost distracted at learning Miss Egerton's danger.

"And Rose—she is safe, you say?"

"Yes; and none the worse—she told me so herself. Her sister is the chief sufferer."

"Olive!"

The ladder was short, and as Thorold was about to creep back towards the bank, the ice cracked again, just where the foot of it rested, and in another moment—no one knows how it happened—both he and Miss Egerton were struggling in the water. I think she must have fainted with the pain of her arm, for when he brought her to the surface a minute later, she seemed quite unconscious. By that time ropes and help were at hand; we dragged them out, and Thorold, dripping like a shaggy Newfoundland, would let no one but himself carry her to the cottage, fortunately not far off. She had revived before I left, and bade me give you her love and beg you would not be anxious about her."

"You left them there?" Viola wondered at the calm, composed tones.

"My uncle was afraid to run the risk of cold in an open sleigh. He hoped you would send the carriage for them as soon as possible with dry clothes and any comforts you can think of. Mrs. Bythesea is looking after them, but they are in a miserable hole—no accommodation of any kind. Miss Egerton and her sister cannot remain there even for the night. I am on my way to barracks to keep an appointment and volunteered to bring you the message."

A little group had gathered in the hall while Captain Kane was speaking. Almost before he had ceased, one messenger had hurried away to order the carriage, another to hunt up pillows and wraps. Lady Mary began enquiring for Mr. Thorold.

"I should like to thank him. Did he come back with you?"

"No, he rode off at once for the doctor, without even waiting to change his clothes. His cool courage was really admirable, but Miss Egerton carried off the honours with us all. It was she who thought of the ladder. Without her pluck and presence of mind all would have been lost."

Lady Mary's face was eloquent, but this was not the moment for enthusiasm. She turned to Viola and said quietly: "Will you go in the carriage, Miss Keith, and bring them back for me? I can perhaps be more useful making preparations at home."

Viola gratefully accepted the commission, which she took as a proof of restored confidence, and while Captain Kane still lingered, re-entered the hall equipped for her drive.

"You have been very quick, my dear. Are you well wrapped for this cold night? She deserves to be cared for, my kind nurse, who took such care of me this afternoon." And with Captain Kane and all the household looking on, she stooped to give Viola one of those

kind caressing pats of approval which she had learned to prize so highly.

The smile of content which the touch provoked was still lingering on Viola's face as, in the midst of cushions and shawls and rugs, she set out on her long, dark drive. It was no time to be thinking of herself, yet the impression of Lady Mary's looks and words dwelt with her still and would not be banished. "If I had but had time to tell her all!" she sighed to herself. "I might have found courage while she spoke so gently. Ten minutes more and my fate might have been decided, and now who knows when such an opportunity may occur again!"

CHAPTER IX.

"MAIN DE FEMME, MAIS MAIN DE FER."

COLONEL KANE was pacing up and down near the little cottage, which was the sole place of shelter among the wintry hills, listening impatiently for the sound of wheels. He came forward eagerly as the carriage stopped and looked unmistakably relieved at sight of Viola.

She enquired for the sisters. Most of his anxiety, as was natural (though quite uncalled for), was reserved for Rose, but he spoke warmly of Olive's heroism as he ushered Viola to the door of an apartment forming the kitchen and sole living-room of the labourer's family, which his wife had given up to the ladies. While Colonel Kane went back to the carriage for blankets and wraps, Viola made her way into the dimly-lighted room where the sisters had found refuge. Rose, enveloped in shawls, sat on one side of the fire; Olive, almost suffocated by a loan collection of furs and wraps contributed by all the party, was lying on an impromptu couch in front of it. The woman had done her best, but that best was not very easy for Olive. She was awake, and brightened at once when she saw who the visitor was, raising her face to receive Viola's kiss, which was given in some agitation. The face was almost colourless, but the eyes were shining with a soft lustre which surprised Viola.

"That is right, Miss Keith, she deserves to be petted!" cried Rose from her seat in the chimney-corner. "Where should I have been but for her?" and she turned her lovely glistening eyes affectionately upon her sister.

"And you?" asked Viola going towards her in turn; "have you quite recovered?"

"Quite; I would go out this minute if Colonel Kane did not fuss so over me. Poor Olive is the only victim. She does not say much about it, but I know that her arm is dreadfully painful. She has strained the muscles badly—all for me!" Her eyes filled with tears. Viola's look anxiously followed hers, and Olive answered it.

"Oh! it is nothing much, and quite easy to bear when I think how much worse things might have been," she said, bravely. "Rose is safe, that is enough. I was so afraid she would get discouraged and lose her hold on me, and my strength could not have held out much longer."

"The ladder was a very happy thought," said Mrs. Bythesea. "It was so lucky you remembered having seen it lying near the boat-house."

"More than lucky," said Olive to herself.

Colonel Kane came to the door with a bag and some shawls from the carriage, and Mrs. Bythesea went to take them from him. He enquired wistfully if Rose were rested enough to dress and come and talk to him a little. The labourer's wife had been boiling some water, and they were all to have a cup of tea before starting, from the supply Lady Mary had sent.

"I will come in five minutes," cried Rose, answering for herself. "Anything is better than this stuffy little room, and well wrapped, I can take no harm out of doors."

Her hasty toilet was soon completed, and when she had gone to join Colonel Kane, Mrs. Bythesea following to assist in the tea-making, came the question of Olive's: a more lengthy affair, since the injury to her arm made every movement painful. Notwithstanding Viola's efforts to save her as much as possible, Olive looked quite faint and exhausted by the time she was arrayed in the warm woollen dress and wraps which her mother had sent, and Viola saw that it was advisable to get the drive home over as soon as possible.

With Colonel Kane's help she arranged the piles of cushions and rugs so as to form a couch, and both were relieved when Olive, somewhat revived by the hot tea, was safely bestowed upon it, while Rose and Viola made themselves as small as possible in the remaining corners. Colonel Kane undertook to drive Mrs. Bythesea, whose party had long ago started homewards. The lamps of his sleigh were often visible at the turns of the road just in advance, and more than once, at the foot of a steep hill, he handed the reins to his groom and came to the carriage window to enquire after its inmates. Olive always answered for herself in cheerful tones, but between times her animation subsided, and the long drive, made more tedious still by the heavy state of the roads, was almost a silent one. Though she made little complaint, her sigh of relief when the carriage at last rolled under the great gateway of the Close, told them something of her suffering.

Colonel Kane was at the door ready to receive Rose, who sprang quickly down and hastened in to reassure her mother with a sight of her, while he waited to help her sister. Someone else, who was standing by, sprang forward to assist him. The darkness hid Olive's sudden change of colour, but Viola could not help perceiving her start and thrill as she allowed herself to be helped down and almost

carried into the house by her two supporters. Once inside, their task was done, and they saw no more of her.

Lady Mary seemed jealous of any hands but her own tending Olive that night. As usual, her looks and touch spoke for her, and were full of the proud love and tenderness she perhaps could not have expressed in any other way, for words from the most eloquent lips are sometimes but poor, inadequate symbols. She carried her off to her room, and never ceased her tender ministering until she had seen Olive safely in bed and comparatively comfortable, watching the firelight dance and flicker upon the familiar walls.

Then Olive became aware all at once of the weary lines upon her mother's face.

"Mother, it is past ten o'clock, and I know that your head is aching. Kiss me and go to bed at once."

"I would rather wait till you are asleep."

"I could not sleep knowing you were sitting up tired out. Look; the bell is within reach. I can send to you if I want anything."

"Then I will go, and come in again the last thing. You look hot and feverish. Pray try and sleep, dear."

"Yes; but send Viola to say good-night to me first. She was so kind this afternoon. There is something very loveable about Viola."

"She is a good little creature, and perhaps I have been judging her rather hardly, though I cannot understand why she should take my displeasure so much to heart. Having owned so much, perhaps you will be satisfied."

Lady Mary met Viola just leaving Mrs. Carr's rooms, and gave Olive's message, warning her not to allow her to talk. But it was evident that sleep was as yet far from Olive's eyes, which shone in the firelight with the same strange happy brightness which Viola had noticed before. She held out her only available hand and drew Viola to a seat on the bed beside her, asking anxiously what had become of the rest? Where was Rose? Had Colonel Kane gone home?—and Mr. Thorold?

An unconscious tremor of the hand holding hers which followed the pause, explained much that had hitherto been mysterious to Viola. She answered demurely that Colonel Kane was still talking to Rose; Mr. Thorold had only waited to hear that she was comfortable, and had then gone home at once.

"He was not hurt?"

"Oh no."

"Did you hear? It was he who saved me."

"Mr. Thorold must have been brave and prompt, but everyone says that you were the real heroine of the day. We are all quite proud of you. Even Mrs. Carr can find no fault this time!"

Before Olive's languid smile had faded, Viola, remembering Lady Mary's injunction, bent over her to say good-night. Olive looked disappointed.

"Do not go. I had so much to say and shall not sleep yet awhile. Viola! tell me, do you think that unequal marriages turn out well? I mean, where the husband, say, is superior in position to the wife?" Her eager eyes scanned Viola's face as she waited in some excitement for the answer.

Viola's breath came quickly for a moment. "Oh! don't ask me!" she cried at last, with averted face. "What makes you think of such a thing?"

It was now Olive's turn to seem embarrassed, but her mother's entrance saved her a reply. Lady Mary looked reproachfully at Viola as she laid her hand on her daughter's burning brow. "I thought you were a good nurse, Miss Keith?"

"Ah! mamma! don't scold Viola! she has been in your black books long enough. It was my fault, too, for she tried to get away. But you must not mind to-night, because I am so happy!"

Lady Mary's silent kiss was unusually demonstrative as she smoothed back the dark hair from the white brow so like her own. Then—she did not quite know if it was to please herself or Olive—out of the fulness of a heart stirred to its very depths with love and gratitude, she stooped once more and, for the first time, pressed another kiss on Viola's cheek. It was not so much the kiss itself as what it signified, which made Viola's heart throb with such exquisite pleasure. A swift, grateful glance from her wistful eyes thanked Lady Mary, as, with a silent good-night to Olive, she hastened away.

Olive, alone presently in the firelight, lay with unclosed eyes watching the flicker of the fitful flames in a not unpleasant reverie. Her arm was burning and painful, but it was not that which kept her spirit wakeful. The physical pain was dulled and deadened by an overmastering sensation of content. Again she felt in imagination the presence of strong arms enfolding her in a firm yet tender clasp, again she heard a voice as if yielding to an irresistible impulse whispering some words that tinged her cheek with colour even here in the solitude of this silent chamber. "*Main de femme mais main de fer! My brave darling, is it you who must be the sufferer?*" A proud triumph swelled her heart to think she had wrung such words from those well-governed lips. "He cares for me! Whatever happens, I know so much at least!" She refused to analyse, or even believe in the thrill of joy which pulsed through her veins at the thought. But at this stage her musings became complicated. How different from all she had ever imagined for herself! This man of no especial descent, without fortune, whose name was not to be found in any red book; as far removed by birth and position from Olive's world as though he lived at the Antipodes. Yet some quaint old lines would keep importunately recurring to her memory, putting to flight the arguments of reason and making themselves heard in spite of everything:

"This man is free from servile bands
Of hope to rise, or fear to fall;
Lord of himself though not of lands,
And having nothing, yet hath all."

Olive had plenty of time for self-communing in the long watches of that wakeful night, during which her throbbing arm grew more and more painful. Dawn was breaking when at length mind and body found rest in a dreamless sleep, which lasted far into the morning. Would she have slumbered as soundly had she known that the hero of her late reverie was already being whirled to town at express speed?

On his way to the station, Thorold had paid an early visit of enquiry at the Archdeacon's, but early as it was, Lady Mary was visible—Lady Mary in a gentle, grateful mood, which showed her at her tenderest, as she pressed his hand and spoke her earnest thanks for his courage and heroism. "Dear Olive, too, is most grateful! She will never forget her obligations to you!"

Obligations! The word seemed out of place somehow in connection with Olive Egerton, and John disdained the thanks almost roughly. He only waited to enquire with pointed impartiality after the health of both sisters before taking leave to spend the next fortnight in town, trying to banish from his mind all thoughts of the corner-house and its inmates. He was driven to this rather tardy piece of wisdom by a chance remark of Miss Hammond's.

The good, timid creature had meditated the warning for some time before she ventured to utter it one morning, as her nephew was preparing to leave the house.

"I hope—I do hope, John, you are not going to the Archdeacon's too often?" The faltering tones revealed the effort it cost her to enter upon such a subject with her reserved nephew.

"What do you mean?" asked Thorold, turning upon her almost fiercely.

"Oh, John! you know! I was thinking of—Olive Egerton! And it is of no use. She refused her cousin, the Honourable Mr. Raleigh, only last year, and everyone said it was because he was only the second son! She is as proud as Lucifer. Oh, yes; indeed she is! and—and, I could not bear that she should scorn you, John."

"I will take care of myself, aunt; never fear," said her nephew, smiling, but somewhat grimly, as he turned his steps in the wonted direction.

But though he pooh-poohed his aunt's caution at the time, it recurred to him later, and perhaps influenced his thoughts and actions more than he would have cared to acknowledge.

(*To be continued.*)

AN OXFORD COMMEMORATION.

"BUT, mamma, we've been all over Europe, and enjoyed ourselves everywhere, and I can't see why we should not expect to have the same good fortune at Oxford."

The speaker was a young American girl of one-and-twenty, who, as she put this question to her mother, tilted her pretty head on one side, and looked decidedly accustomed to have her own way.

"I have tried to explain to you," Mrs. Durant expostulated, "that an English university town is like nowhere else in the world, that ——"

"Is the very reason why I want to see it," broke in the first speaker, Alma. "We've been to so many places which are the same things over again with different names: especially lately. I declare last night I could not remember whether we were in Worcester or Gloucester! Now, if I only recollect Oxford, by not having understood it, that will be something, wont it?"

"If you recollect it because you were uncomfortable there, and felt neglected," said Mrs. Durant, as she yielded, as her custom was, to her daughter, "you must not blame me for it. I know perfectly well that to enjoy Oxford a girl wants to have some friends there who will take her about, and we don't know a soul! Why, years ago, when I visited it with your poor father, we had a dozen friends to begin with, and made a dozen more before we left; they went with us everywhere, and showed us everything, and got us all the tickets we wanted, and took us out rowing, and ——"

"Well, mamma, and we must go by ourselves, and find out what we can with the help of your memory and of a guide-book; and the tickets we can't buy we must do without; and instead of rowing, we must walk; and instead of twenty-four friends, we shall have none."

"So long as you are pleased with that prospect, my dear, I am satisfied," said Mrs. Durant; which terse remark summed up her life and its aspirations. She was a widow ruled by this her only child, Alma. And Alma, be it said to her credit, was a kindly and considerate task-mistress, taking care that her own way should be a pleasant one to her mother, and tyrannizing with a gentle tyranny which kept her mother young and sprightly.

There was little which is commonly considered American about either Mrs. Durant or Alma. They came from Boston, where manners and customs are less pronounced than in New York, and they had been so long in Europe that they had lost almost all traces of their nationality. To a nice observer, those that remained the more surely marked them. Alma's clear, pale complexion, and her thin, fine face, with its eager, searching, restless expression, were undeniably striking,

but they might belong to any delicately organised young girl, English or American; her small white hands, and the peculiar, graceful pose of her head, were the product of over the sea only; her voice and her phraseology were the same as everybody else's; but a slight quaint intonation, the smallest rise in the tone of her voice at the end of a sentence, marked very plainly whence she came.

"And I'm glad there *is* something of the American about us," Alma used to say; "or else, when we get home again, we shall be treated like strangers there too, and I'm downright tired of being a stranger everywhere."

As Mrs. Durant had foretold, this feeling of loneliness was especially oppressive in Oxford.

The two ladies took up their quarters at the Mitre Inn, where they had a sitting room overlooking the High Street, and could watch the friendly, happy, careless life which is there carried on.

It was the middle of the summer term, and all the men who were not in for their final schools, and a good many of those who were, were bent upon enjoying themselves. Alma soon learned to know the different types of undergraduates. The spectacled scholar starting off for his solitary exercise in the parks, and longing all the while to be back again at his books; the boating or cricketing man, who ran by in flannels early in the afternoon, and sauntered back, tired and hot, late in the evening; the idle man, the "masher" of Oxford, in fact, who, got up to the last degree, began and ended his afternoon in walking up and down the High Street, and drinking tea in the different rooms; and, lastly, that strange anomaly, who bears no resemblance to anything in the wide world—the æsthete.

All these, and many more besides, Alma watched pass by beneath her window, and was all the while as completely isolated from them and from their life as if she saw them through a camera obscura.

The two ladies took their daily exercise, at first with, and then without the tell-tale red guide-book. They had learned the names of all the colleges by heart, they had been into all the quadrangles and gardens of most of them; but the libraries, the chapels, most of all, the interiors of those fascinating oriel-windowed rooms were closed mysteries to them. It was the same at the river, where, while they watched other ladies being taken by their friends on to the college barges, and into the new University boat-house, they could only keep to the towing-path, and wonder over the mysteries of bumping races and college regattas.

Still, Alma persisted in remaining at Oxford, and assured her mother that she enjoyed seeing life as an outsider.

One afternoon, when term was drawing to a close, and the festivities of the coming Commemoration were already interrupting the ordinary life of the place, Mrs. and Miss Durant strolled along the owing-path towards Sandford Lock.

"Look at that funny little man with the spectacles," said Alma. "What is he going to do in a boat with those young fellows?"

And a more experienced waterman than Alma might indeed have wondered. A small, middle-aged strangely dressed Don (I call him a Don, because that dignity was indisputably obvious in him), who was walking along the opposite bank, had stopped and interchanged a few remarks with two fine young fellows in flannels, who were paddling down stream in a light outrigged dingey. It appeared that the don wanted to get across to the other side, and the undergraduates offered to take him there. Two in a dingey is delightful, but more than that certainly requires care. Whether this was wanting on the part of the don, who was decidedly unaccustomed to boats, or in the young men, who were not averse to any amusement which might turn up, is not known; but certainly, as the dingey neared the shore, where Miss Durant stood watching it, in a very neat and wholly inexplicable manner the poor little don toppled out of it head foremost into the water, black coat, edition of "Catullus," which he held in his hand, wide-awake hat, spectacles, and all! He could not swim, and this the young fellows either guessed or knew, for one of them at once went in after him, and dragged him with all his belongings to shore.

Alma afterwards said she never in her life had seen, and certainly could not reasonably expect to see again, a sight so funny as this little don crawling out on his hands and knees from his unexpected bath, and facing the ladies dripping, disconsolate, and half-drowned!

Mrs. Durant was full of sympathy.

"I'm so sorry for your unfortunate accident," she said to him. "I wish there was something I could do for you."

Alma was carrying a light shawl on her arm, in case they should stay out late and need it; she now came up, and, offering it to him, said, in her sweetest voice: "I hope you will put this round you; it is soft and dry, and may prevent you from catching cold."

The Don looked quite confused at the politeness of this gentle-toned young girl as he accepted the shawl, and stammered out, "Much obliged—much obliged."

"I am sorry I have no wrap for you," said Mrs. Durant to the young fellow, also wet through, who stood by, watching with restrained mirth the quaint scene: "but I dare say you will get yourself warm by running back."

"Warm," he said, smiling; "why, to be wet through in the Summer Term is my normal condition."

Alma, too, smiled at this, and the drenched Don, looking more utterly miserable than ever, lifted his limp, heavy hat to the ladies, and hurried along the towing-path towards Oxford.

"Professor Powis has forgotten to ask for your address," said the young fellow. "I am sure to-morrow morning he will be sending me

all over Oxford to find it, that he may return the shawl. Do you mind telling it me—I belong to his College."

"I am very glad to save you both trouble. I am Mrs. Durant, and we are staying at the Mitre Inn."

Then the young fellow was afraid of forgetting this, and had no paper or pencil with him, and Alma had to supply both; so that altogether there was no little needless delay on his part before he finally got into the boat and sculled off with great vigour, hoping that Alma knew enough about rowing to admire his "form."

The next morning the shawl was returned, with the card of Professor Powis, M—— College, attached to it, and a message of thanks.

The following Sunday was "Show Sunday." Mrs. and Miss Durant knew nothing of the (now obsolete) fashion of parading up and down the Broad Walk on that particular afternoon; but as they sat in their room a messenger brought them up two tickets for the afternoon service at Magdalen Chapel. They were in an envelope, addressed to Miss Durant, "with compliments;" and Alma blushed a little as she saw them, and dressed herself to go out and use them.

"Who do you think sent them you?" her mother asked.

"Why, who could it be, but the nameless young boating man!"

Which conviction may have added zest to her walk to the chapel, but was certainly entirely forgotten during the service, which in every detail was absolutely perfect. The anthem was Mendelssohn's "Hear my Prayer;" and when it was over, Alma remarked, enthusiastically, if irreverently: "I don't believe they could do it better than that in heaven!"

The next day the same messenger brought tickets to Miss Durant, to admit two to the University barge to see the procession of boats, and Alma recognised the young giver of them as he stood up in his college eight and saluted the head of the river, and when he saw her she tried to send him her thanks in a very bright smile.

Wednesday, tickets were sent her, not only for the conferring of the honorary degrees in the theatre, but for the concert at Magdalen in the evening, and a lovely bouquet of flowers to take to the same. Alma was becoming quite embarrassed by all this gratuitous kindness, and her chief desire now was to meet and thank her undergraduate friend.

During the interval between the first and second parts of the concert, she espied Professor Powis coming towards her with ices and claret cup, which he was offering the ladies; she accepted an ice from him, and although he looked as nervous and shy as before, and she scarcely knew if he recognised her, she claimed his acquaintance by hoping that he was none the worse for his accident.

He timidly sat down on a vacant chair beside her and, nursing the bowl of claret cup on his knees, said hurriedly: "No, no, your kindness, you know—it was most unfortunate."

Alma thought it must be this particular subject which he disliked, and tried to put him more at his ease.

"What a lovely, lovely concert this is," she said: "I do not know when I have been so charmed by any music."

"I suppose it is—I am told so." Professor Powis answered, as though he had heard a report which he hardly believed, and not as though he were actually listening to the performance.

"I can't think how you get such beautiful voices, all in one college. And then, the boys, who are they?"

"Oh! one is called Barnes, and another White, and another——"

"I meant, not exactly what their names are, but where do they come from: are they just Oxford boys, or is there a special school here to collect and train them?"

But Alma's sweet presence and voice completely confused Professor Powis. "Oh, I don't know!" he stammered out; "I'm not musical. You must ask Smith."

"But I don't know Mr. Smith."

"Don't you? The man who upset me."

"No; but I want to."

"He ought to be here to-night, only he isn't. He is at one of the balls, I suppose."

"Will you ask him to call upon me," said Alma, with the spirit of a true American. "I particularly want to see him, to thank him."

Presumably, this audacity so completely astonished the Professor that he managed to upset the claret bowl over himself and Alma, and, in a state of confusion which was pitiable, he fumbled in his pockets for the handkerchief he had forgotten to put there. Alma found it impossible not to laugh as she shook herself and wiped her dress, and Mrs. Durant held the bowl for the Professor, and assistance was offered on all sides. He accepted none of it; but muttering, "I will tell Smith to call, and I beg your pardon," he vanished for the rest of the evening.

The next afternoon, looking bright and handsome, and flattered, as well he might be, young Smith called upon Miss Durant. She met him in the middle of the room, offering him her hand frankly, with a smile, which ought to have been, and, I take it, was, very gratifying to him.

"I wanted to see you," she said, "that I might thank you for all your kindness to me."

"My kindness!" he said, in the utmost amazement. "What kindness? I don't understand you!"

"Why in sending us tickets for everything, and flowers, and making us enjoy our Oxford Commemoration, more than I can tell you."

"But I never sent you a ticket for anything in my life!"

"You did *not!*"

"No, assuredly not; I wish I had!"

Alma looked grave and thoughtful for a moment.

"Then Professor Powis did," she said, and involuntarily both she and Smith smiled.

"You must forgive the poor Professor," said Smith: "I'm sure it's the first time he has ever been guilty of such a thing."

"Forgive him! what do you mean? I must thank him, as I meant to thank you."

"And you, I suppose," Smith continued, "are the young lady with whom he distinguished himself last night."

"You have heard about that?" she said. "Well, he was rather shy and clumsy, but he's been very good to me, all the same."

"That I am sure of, and believe me if you want truly to show your gratitude to him you will not let him know you have discovered his secret;. a man like Powis would never hear the last of it, if it were to get abroad that he had been anonymously sending you tickets and flowers. He wouldn't indeed."

"And I told him I wanted to thank *you*," Alma went on, following her own thoughts; "no wonder he upset the claret cup in astonishment at my stupidity!" Smith did not look best pleased at this inference, but she continued without noticing his expression: "Mr. Smith, now that Professor Powis knows that I have seen you and must have found out the truth, I cannot be so rude as to leave his kindness unacknowledged. I must write to him, or see him, somehow!"

During the whole of this interview, Smith had been chiefly concerned at his own folly, in having missed the golden opportunity which Alma had credited him with having made such good use of, and he had been anxiously meditating as to how he could make up for lost time. A happy thought now struck him.

"Miss Durant," said he, "will you and your mother come to my rooms to-morrow afternoon to tea, and I will ask Professor Powis to meet you; and you can show him as much gratitude as ever you please, for I will have no one else there."

"How good you are! I'm sure we shall be delighted to accept your invitation—shan't we, mother?" she said, appealing to Mrs. Durant, who had just come into the room.

And with the understanding that he was to call the next day and fetch the ladies, Smith left them. He had only reached the bottom of the stairs when another happy thought struck him, and he came running back and knocked at their room.

"I have just recollected that there is to be a private dance in one of the fellows' rooms in T—— to-night," he said. "Will you, Mrs. Durant, bring your daughter to it, if I send you an invitation?"

They demurred a few moments, and then accepted this further kindness. And before the end of the evening, Smith managed to fall completely in love with Alma Durant.

When Professor Powis joined the afternoon tea-party the next day, he had already relinquished his short-lived dream concerning this fair American girl, though it may be not without a sigh, for

middle-aged dons have feelings as well as other people. Alma came up to him, and blushingly acknowledged her mistake, and hoped it was not too late to thank him.

"Ah! Miss Durant, it was not your mistake, but mine and Smith's, which we have both found out now," he said. "You only imagined things as they ought to have been; and as for your thanks, why all good things improve with keeping."

After which unexampled piece of eloquence, on the part of Professor Powis, to which Smith silently applauded "Hear! hear!" the Professor devoted himself assiduously to Mrs. Durant, and seemed a great deal less shy in talking to her than he had done when he was listening to Alma.

The end of the tale is not very surprising, though it is amusing. Smith married Alma Durant, and Professor Powis married her mother!

H. F.

TREU UND FEST.

SOME blame the years that fly so fast,
And sigh o'er loves and friendships gone;
While others say too long they last,
And wish each day were earlier done.

But thou art none of these—to thee
The past *is* past: past not in vain.
Days lived in life's reality—
What need to wish them here again?

Days hallowed each by noble use—
What need to wish them earlier done?
Who spend their souls in time's abuse
Are eager for to-morrow's sun.

Thy trust and rest unbroken are:
In God's appointed pathway still
Thy constant spirit, like a star,
Moves on accomplishing His will.

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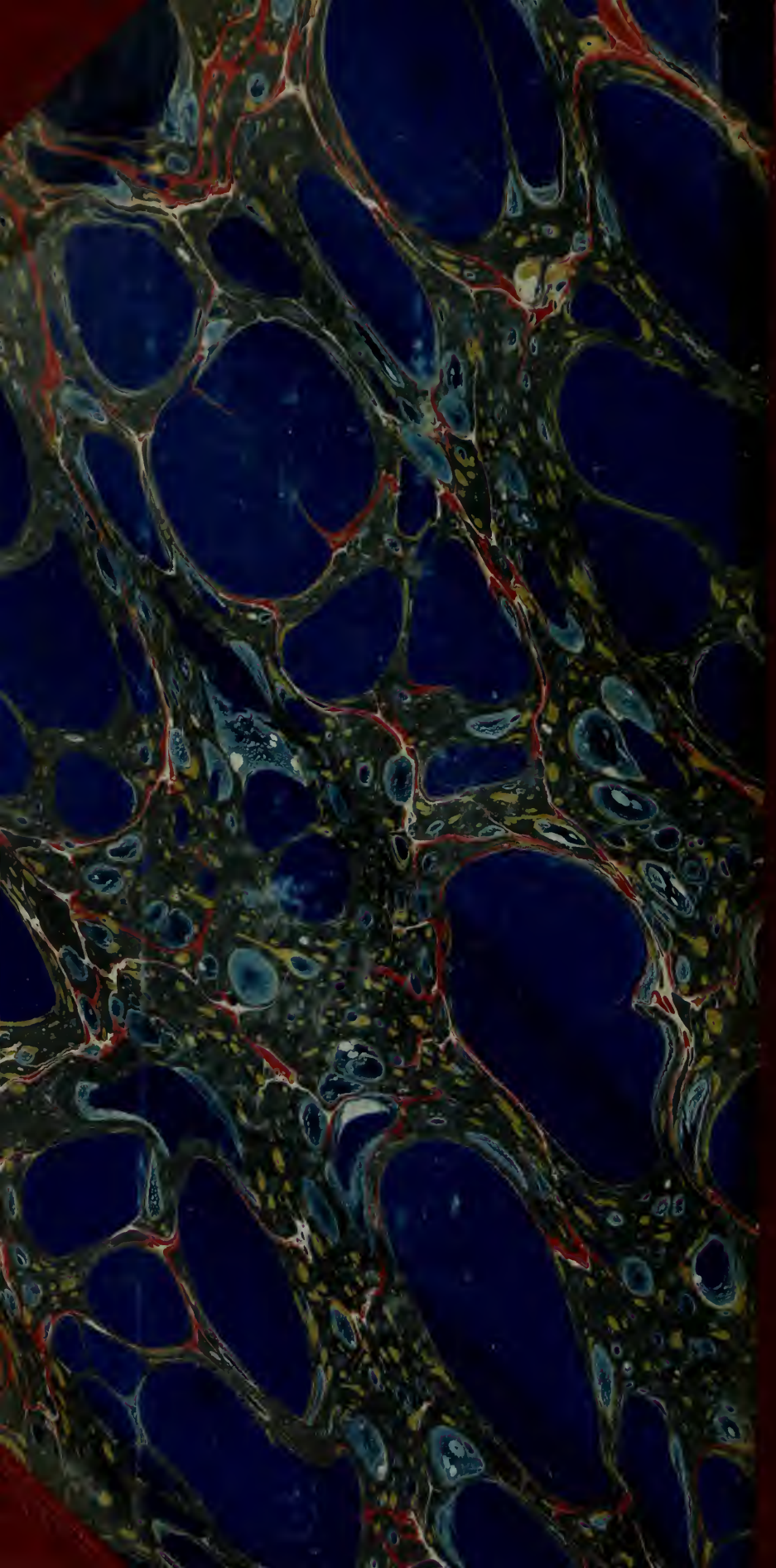
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